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**Italo Calvino, ovvero the author in criticism:
Calvino's authorial image between metaphors
and reading conventions in Italy, the United
States and the United Kingdom**

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p. 153: Cover of Italo Calvino, *Cosmicomics* (Harvest/HBJ, 1976)

Cover of Italo Calvino, *Cosmicomics* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976).

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted for a degree at another university. Inclusions of articles that have appeared in journals, as well as from a former dissertation at Master's level, have been mentioned in the footnotes to the respective sections.

Abstract

Italo Calvino is a writer who metamorphoses, but also a highly recognizable writer, whose signature is almost a trademark, whose style is unmistakably his own. This thesis traces some of the reasons for this recognizability of the authorial image of Calvino, an image that has been produced and sculpted over time through different means and media, co-created by critics, readers and Calvino himself. Calvino's presence in media and paratext, publishing houses and intellectual circles, journals and newspapers forms an intrinsic part of the studied material. This material is explicitly put into dialogue with critical volumes and the way academics arrive at, formulate and circulate knowledge: this enquiry into the form(ul)ation of critical discourses is a crucial part of what is explored in this dissertation. Because Calvino's circulation is transnational, a comparison is made between the American, British and Italian reception of his works, focusing both on differences and similarities. The question as to what happens to an authorial image in translation and circulation forms a spine throughout the thesis and a conscious effort is made not to separate critics and readers, editorial and academic contexts, high and low literature, Italian and non-Italian readings.

A discussion along canonical fault lines is therefore a central part of the dissertation: what has propelled Calvino to the status of 'modern classic'? Resistance to Calvino's canonization is discussed in order to get a better sense of the canonical negotiations that surround Calvino. The 'essential Calvino' that has been distilled in criticism is put alongside a range of possible, parallel 'minor Calvini', that have been less visible because of cultural, material or historical reasons. Ample room will be reserved for a 'science fiction' Calvino, who is much more visible in the Anglo-Saxon readings. Other alternative Calvini which are investigated include a feminist Calvino, a posthuman Calvino and an ecologist Calvino.

Introduction

After a long day of walking through the desert, the weary traveller comes to Academia. The inhabitants of Academia are nowhere to be seen, even though a faint whisper tells you that pages are being turned in the houses shaped like metaphors. There is a Labyrinth, which from the outside seems nothing more than walls. There is an imposing Eye-shaped edifice, with mirrors inside and a myriad telescopes that inspect bodies, flesh and bones that are out of sight. There is a mansion full of maps and books that charter worlds of paper which may never have existed. Outside the town's walls sits a man, an author as one can see from the signature on his always frowning forehead, made up of words and phrases. His books are the objects of study in the town, which is built to match his lines, but he is in self-imposed exile. He does not want to interfere, especially now that he's dead. He dips his pen in a utopia of fine dust and reflects on what to write invisibly.

Few Italian writers have crossed borders like Italo Calvino, both during his life and after his death. His reputation is not confined to Italy, or to literary circles for that matter. Translations are manifold, courses that include his works plenty, and bookstores still tend to present his most well-known volumes where they can easily be seen and bought. With a good claim to pertaining to the category of the modern classic, Calvino seems settled down to quiet, posthumous fame, the kind of fame that is almost restricted to a name (the name on the cover of his books). And yet, there is something stale about this Calvino, who arguably has stayed too comfortably still on his shelf, more admired than reread in a way that keeps him sparkling. New possible 'Calvini' continue to flare up, but they are rarely long-lived or in proper dialogue with each other or the tradition of Calvino criticism. The idea that Calvino is an exciting writer in continuous metamorphosis does not chime with the fact that he gives the impression of being an author that is more or less 'read and buried', the essence of whom is, once and for all, crystal clear.

This thesis aims to present an overview of some dominant patterns in how Calvino has been read, whilst at the same time suggesting readings that seem to have been slightly overlooked, or to be budding in new approaches. As a critique of criticism that continues to encompass present-day criticism, there seems to be a clear attempt at a meta-approach which is aprioristically impossible. However, my

conviction is that the search for new Calvini is at its most fruitful when earlier readings are taken into account in their historical and cultural specificity. Instead of theorizing an academia that is inherently placeless, bodiless and non-individual, my account is bound to – in the end – fairly material conditions such as availability and visibility, hierarchy and resonance of proposed readings. By suggesting that readings are never presented in a vacuum, I contend that the way Calvino has been read over time is not necessarily dominated by the primary text that is being analysed.

Many tensions and grey areas between supposed binary oppositions will come to the fore repeatedly in this thesis. An important tension in a more and more globalizing world is that between the local, the national and the international, transnational or global. This tension will arise time and again here, when speaking about canons, cultures of reading, celebrity and authorial images, circulation and translation. The comparative nature of the thesis is aimed at finding both points of overlap and of friction, of ‘untranslatability’ one might say, between different ‘Calvini’ that are tied to different disciplines and theoretical fields and the ensuing distinct reading strategies. The idea is emphatically *not* to adopt an order or to (re)affirm possible hierarchies, such as Italian and non-Italian, or established and ‘loose’ threads. Thus I hope in part to be able to counter the inevitable ‘carattere “nazionale” delle bibliografie e dei cataloghi delle biblioteche italiane’ to which Laura Di Nicola alludes (but one does not have to confine this statement to Italian libraries alone) and which ‘esclude la possibilità di lavorare dall’Italia sui fenomeni letterari in prospettiva internazionale, sulla storia delle opere e sulla diffusione all’estero degli autori italiani’.¹ A ‘cosmopolitan’ author like Calvino warrants such a border-crossing approach like few others.

However, one of the dangers in comparison is to present a picture of mere contrasts, with neatly separated receptions in different countries that do not interconnect, resonate or coincide. Even though there are some crucial differences that can be pointed out between the Italian, English and American Calvino, it is vital not to construe these differences as somehow intrinsic, unchanging. Instead, the aim is to present context-bound readings, that are produced in a specific cultural climate

¹ Laura Di Nicola, ‘Il canone inverso: i classici italiani del Novecento all’estero’, *Libri in viaggio: classici italiani in Svezia*, ed. by Laura Di Nicola and Cecilia Schwartz (Stockholm: Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis, 2013), pp. 64-88, p. 65.

and which partially differ from other and earlier readings, but sometimes follow the very same melody. There is thus no clear categorization of an ‘Italian’ reception vis-à-vis a non-Italian one. Similarly, the structure of the thesis is not linear, it does not strive to represent any teleological order, but instead repeats thematic nodes, if always with a crucial difference that comes with a variety of vantage points. No part of the thesis operates in a vacuum, just as no reading ever presents itself in a vacuum.

At the same time, I believe that due attention should be paid to the category of the ‘untranslatable’, in a world in which sometimes the illusion prevails that everything is readily available everywhere. Peter Osborne has characterized the ‘untranslatable’ as that which refers to ‘the conceptual differences carried by the differences between languages, not in a pure form, but via the fractured histories of translation through which European philosophies have been constituted.’² As an author, ‘Italo Calvino’ can be (and has been) largely considered as a constellation of metaphors, terms and recurring phrases and themes, which in part have created their own critical vocabulary: when this vocabulary crosses borders, it is necessarily translated, a process which is often somewhat obscured when it comes to *academic* practices. ‘Italo Calvino’, in my view, can in part be seen as an untranslatable, an ‘entity’ that resists full globalization: and precisely in these fractures we find meaning, the negotiation of what Calvino really means to different readers in different moments and places.

A different but connected tension that will serve as a common thread is the distinction – as productive as it is problematic – that still tends to be made quite systematically between a naïve mass called ‘audience’ and the perceptive, individualized ‘critic’ or ‘academic’. My contention is that both are part of reading cultures and receptive to reading conventions. These reading cultures are to be found both at a microsocial and a macrosocial level, which means that the ‘audience’ is made up of different reading communities and the ‘critic’ is also part of the bigger ‘audience’. In the course of my analysis, I will try not to artificially separate ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture, ‘informed’ and ‘naïve’ readings, preferring to suggest how they inform each other just as they inform each individual. Critics who ‘suspect’ that Calvino is often playing cat and mouse with his readers, almost inevitably underline

² Cit. in: Emily Apter, *Against World Literature: on the Politics of Untranslatability* (London; New York: Verso, 2013), p. 32.

that he manages to fool only ‘uncritical readers’ which constitute ‘the public’.³ Losing sight of differences is of course a slippery slope, one that I hope to have handled with care. Nonetheless, rendering these differences unchanging and absolute is, arguably, just as problematic.

The method I have adopted can be called a form of ‘discourse analysis’, albeit one that is imbued with socio-cultural, contextual colourings. My approach in this is close to that of Martin Jay, who states that for him the analysis of discourse aims to uncover ‘a welter of overlapping attitudes, arguments and assumptions shared by a large number of otherwise disparate thinkers.’⁴ This last aspect cannot be stressed enough: the fact that in this thesis I tend to individuate clusters and nodes of thought that are surprisingly consistent throughout critical analyses does *not* mean that I think these analyses are not worthwhile or even extremely insightful, nor that they essentially all say the same. At the same time, however, individuating some of these repetitive patterns of thought and debate might lead to open up new ways of dealing with an author about whom so much has been written already, upon whom the weight of critical tradition rests heavily, but not (I hope to show) irredeemably.

A further critical node is the (probably irresolvable) ‘battle’ between authors and readers. In this thesis, the author will be fully acknowledged as an important party in critical negotiations around meaning and value of works, but this will (again) be done precisely by erasing the clear boundaries between ‘authors’ and ‘readers’. To put it in the most banal way possible: authors are always readers and vice versa. Both ‘sides’ (if one can really properly speak of sides) are implicated in a society, in a network of communications that is constantly mediated, concretely, by technology and media that help shape our world. Thus, more than the author *per se*, authority will be at the core of many passages here. Authority might be difficult to ‘prove’ as well as never merely individual – and thus by its very nature elusive, immaterial – but at the same time it is a very real factor in determining which readings will come to dominate. One does not need to ‘demonize’ Calvino to acknowledge the very

³ Cf. Joseph Francese, ‘The Refashioning of Calvino’s Public Self-image in the 1950s and Early 1960s’, *The Italianist*, 27 (2007), 125-50, p. 138; Joseph Francese, ‘The Engaged Intellectual: Calvino’s Public Self-image in the 1960s’, *Romance Studies*, 26 (2008), 163-79, p. 169; Bridget Tompkins, Bridget, *Calvino and the Pygmalion Paradigm* (Leicester: Troubadour, 2015), pp. 167-68.

⁴ Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: the Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1993), p. 588.

important voice he has had in the critical establishment of the meaning of his works, and this voice has been heard by specialized scholars and ‘normal’ readers alike.

Just as Elizabeth Leake has done in the case of Ignazio Silone (but John Rodden’s volumes on George Orwell, James Pearson’s on Henry James and Catherine O’Rawe’s on Luigi Pirandello are also fruitful material for comparison), I will trace ‘one individual’s planned revision of his own image’, the way the novelist can almost entirely be identified with his protagonists, turning her or him into someone whose identity is foremost a *textual* one.⁵ It is my contention that Calvino, being an editor, critic, journalist, writer and reader, had multiple voices which he frequently used, becoming almost omnipresent in a surreptitious manner, not always evident on the surface, but equally ubiquitous. Attention will therefore be given to Calvino’s paratextual presence at the margins of his own and others’ books (of fiction and non-fiction), detecting his dispersed tiptoe-footsteps and the myriad ways in which he moulded various authorities into ever-changing, meaningful shapes. The underlying hypothesis is that literary canon and ‘contextual’ factors are intricately connected and always implied in literary criticism, making the distinction between ‘commercial’ and editorial activities on the one hand and critical ones on the other less clear-cut and, eventually, even potentially misleading. For the same reason, references to interviews with Calvino are included often throughout the thesis, since, in my view, these constitute a part of the information we inevitably read into the text when we read ‘Italo Calvino’.

It is my contention that, given the above, it is critically productive to treat Calvino as some sort of a ‘celebrity’, not so much as a fully-fledged, Hollywood kind of celebrity, but more as someone who is well-known, especially in specific circles, and whose ‘fame’ inevitably has repercussions both for his self-presentation and for how he and his books are represented by others. Even if he was no academic himself, Calvino has important traits of what Jeffrey Williams has termed the ‘academostar’, but was also a master of publicity in a broader sense, and thus managed to fruitfully

⁵ Elizabeth Leake, *The Reinvention of Ignazio Silone* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), pp. 6, 8, 145; Cf. *The Prefaces of Henry James: Framing the Modern Reader* (The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997); John Rodden, *The Politics of Literary Reputation: George Orwell* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2002); Catherine O’ Rawe, *Authorial Echoes: Textuality and Self-Plagiarism in the Narrative of Luigi Pirandello* (Oxford: Legenda, 2005).

combine what Williams calls ‘visibility’ and ‘citationality’.⁶ Calvino knew well how Modernist writers managed to ‘disappear’ into an ambiguous, partial presence, into a ‘signature’, which served almost as a brand name. Celebrity, as Rosemary Coombe reminds us, is ‘authored in a multiplicity of sites of interpretive practice. The celebrity image is a cultural lode of multiple meaning, mined for its symbolic resonances.’⁷ Precisely in this sense, Calvino’s image – co-created by Calvino and other writers and critics, and even by the broader workings of ‘culture’ – forms an important and continuing impetus from which critical analyses take their cue.

Like Joe Moran, I believe that there was never a ‘prelapsarian state in which major figures rise to prominence naturally’, and that the ‘general dissemination of different forms of publicity in contemporary culture’ blurs the boundaries of the different ways in which an author’s name may circulate. Calvino himself was very clearly part of a society with an increasingly visible mediatic culture and, more specifically, of the editorial context of *Einaudi*, which made him highly conscious of the two-way permeability and interrelation of ‘high’ culture and ‘popular’ culture as well as of the rules and patterns in a broader exchange economy. In Calvino’s works one readily perceives the effects this creates in what Pierre Bourdieu would call a ‘heteronomous’ part of the cultural field, and specifically in a ‘high’ author like Calvino, namely ‘a cynicism which at once sows self-suspicion, and confronts the writer with a resistance to writing that writing itself must find a way to overcome.’⁸ Calvino is both ‘operator’ and ‘object’ in this exchange economy that combines literary, symbolic value with economic value.⁹

Chapter one addresses precisely this imbrication of mediatic, editorial and critical activity in defining and redefining authorial images. As in all the chapters, Calvino is a central part of the critical polyphony, both as subject and as object. Section 1.1 serves as a theoretical trampoline, which should not be considered as a comprehensive summary of the approaches contained within the thesis, but as a set

⁶ Cf. Jeffrey J. Williams, ‘Academostars: Name Recognition’, in *The Celebrity Culture Reader*, ed. by David P. Marshall (New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 371-88.

⁷ Rosemary Coombe, ‘Authorizing the Celebrity: Engendering Alternative Identities’, in *The Celebrity Culture Reader*, cit., pp. 721-69.

⁸ Andrew Wernick, ‘Authorship, and the Supplement of Promotion’, in *What is an Author?*, ed. by Maurice Biriotti and Nicola Miller (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), pp. 85-103.

⁹ Cf. Jérôme Meizoz, *Postures littéraires: mises en scène modernes de l’auteur* (Geneva: Slatkine, 2007).

of premises that have formed an important impetus behind the more detailed analysis of clusters in the constellation of Calvino criticism. Most of all, this part aims to offer a first indication of why the presence of the author and authority matter for literary criticism, and where we should imperfectly ‘locate’ such a presence, namely certainly not solely in the text, but also in the context and the paratext, the pre-text and the post-text, in short: in everything that colours our reading without being materially included in the book we predominantly comment upon. Section 1.2 further substantiates this by showing how the presence of ‘Italo Calvino’, the authoring figure that gives coherence to a textual corpus, has been pivotal in critical examinations of his works. This authoring figure is sieved from his ‘style’ and his commentaries, most notably his prefaces (of which the 1964 preface to *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* is without a doubt the most influential). Then, in section 1.3, Calvino’s alleged ‘testaments’, *Palomar* and the *Lezioni americane* are central in a discussion of the role of perceived autobiographical parts in Calvino’s textual presence and the way dominant readings of his ‘autobiographical’ volumes strongly influence his authorial image. Thereafter, in 1.4, an exploration of Calvino’s editorial ‘style’ and his paratextual presence is extended to his seemingly natural presence at the margins of academic volumes.

Chapter two examines in more detail canonical aspects of Calvino’s critical circulation. Firstly, the importance of a pluralistic vision of ‘canon’ and the ‘anti-canon’ atmosphere in current academic criticism are underlined, to be followed by a discussion of the interconnection of canon and poetics and the related canonical negotiations (even in the case of an author that was reputedly ‘born a classic’). The closeness to certain ‘names’ and writers, such as Cesare Pavese, Elio Vittorini and Ludovico Ariosto, is a vital part of the argument. In the middle section the sometimes strong resistance of the ‘anti-Calvinists’ – who have been many, in spite of his reputation – provides a ‘negative’ which helps to render visible the most important reasons for Calvino’s widespread status as a modern classic. The last part looks at a particular canonization of the Ligurian author in an international (predominantly Anglo-Saxon) context, as a postmodern author (a reading of which Italian critics have tended to be less convinced), as well as of a writer of ‘bestseller di qualità’ like Umberto Eco and, above all, Jorge Luis Borges, with whom he has started to form something of a rotating binary star system.

Within the thesis, Anglo-Saxon and Italian readings are intertwined as much as possible, but a general tendency is certainly to be seen in the gradual movement from a more Italian viewpoint to a more Anglo-Saxon one. Following this approximate logic, chapter three presents a fairly ‘American’ (and to a lesser extent, English) view on an important and much discussed nucleus in Calvino’s oeuvre: the *Cosmicomiche*. The question as to whether the *Cosmicomiche* are science fiction is not so much treated theoretically, but more traced in the fractured history of differing responses to Calvino’s works. As in earlier chapters, the first section sets the stage by providing the necessary socio-historical background, in this case by focusing on the debate on science fiction in Italy in the 1950s and 1960s. The problematic position of the genre within Italy, viewed by many as non-Italian, intrinsically popular and escapist, is put into dialogue with the growing interest of readers and (some) critics, as well as of Calvino himself. Then, in 3.2, the possibility of a science fiction Calvino will be posited, through an array of mostly American and English examples and affiliations. Closing the section is the negotiation – within Italy – about the nature of the *Cosmicomiche* with respect to science fiction, which includes a welter of voices and opinions but, in my rendition, Calvino himself is among the prominent voices in the debate.

The final chapter ventures to offer some possible answers to the question: what happens to ‘Italo Calvino’ in translation? Translation here should be construed as any form of rewriting or change by transition to a fundamentally different context, to a different culture, be that of a country or an academic environment. The first section addresses the matter of Calvino’s cosmopolitanism and ‘italianità’ and the way critics often take this tension into account without trying to disentangle paradoxical strands. One of the fundamental underlying questions is: how difficult or easy is it to translate Calvino and to read him in translation? This matter is, however, emphatically *not* approached from a technical, linguistic point of view (this would require a separate thesis), but as in the case of the other themes within the thesis, followed internally within the critical logic and unspoken premises to establish the importance of this knot for scholars who investigate Calvino. The second section shows how the concrete specificities of the Anglo-Saxon circulation have helped to firmly establish the idea of a ‘fantastic’, ludic Calvino, creator of his own idiosyncratic, non-realistic worlds. In the last part, newer readings of Calvino are

presented (but still more often than not tied to tradition, to some suggestions made very early on by Italian critics), moving from the more traditionally Italian theme of *impegno*, towards animal studies, ecocriticism, posthumanism and feminist studies.

This final section might at first seem the most heterogeneous one, which in part is true, since it is aimed at suggesting how some relatively recent developments in cultural studies have opened up new theoretical viewpoints from which to consider Calvino in a fruitful way. The inevitable selection of themes that would warrant a much more elaborate set of separate analyses is, of course, highly personal, which probably means by extension that the last section is the most personal one, in which my own motivations, doubts and preferences come to the fore and my voice enters the debate in a slightly more emphatic manner. Nonetheless, I believe that the parts do meaningfully interrelate and the presentation is therefore not simply haphazard, chaotic, but instead should suggest ways in which these readings tease out similar questions about Calvino. Moreover, this section clearly investigates more broadly some possibilities and limitations of reading strategies that we adopt as academics.

This last point is crucial to all chapters: this dissertation strives to be not just about Calvino or even Calvino criticism, but also about trends, fashions and underlying patterns within criticism and what they mean. Although they are the product of meticulous research, I would not in any way claim their objectivity. ‘Objective’ is still almost an epithet of Calvino and the question as to its value and even as to what it means recurs frequently within the thesis. I am fully aware that I have adopted the position of a ‘barone rampante’ myself, as every critic needs to do to some extent. However, the fact that a problem becomes more pronounced in the sense that it is more clearly visible, recognizable, does not mean that the problem in itself is also bigger: in the end, this dissertation is (or at least strives to be) implicated in academic debates, and thus also rules and conventions, regardless of the specific point of view that I have presented in turning the lens towards critics instead of exclusively to the letter of the text.

Analogously, the current analysis does not in any way pretend to be exhaustive: the sheer quantity of the material precludes such a pretention from the start. The selection made here is certainly doubly partial, both in the sense of ‘only part of the whole’ as in the sense of ‘biased’: this is again true for every critical

contribution, also one that seems to suggest an overview, a meta-perspective. For example, the choice to focus (apart from the Italian context) on the United States and the United Kingdom, is necessarily an arbitrary one, and even if within Calvino criticism these countries can be said to be strangely ‘marginal’, nonetheless this might still be viewed as a ‘dominant’, ‘Western’ image. Moreover, one might point out that such a choice means disregarding for instance the French circulation of Calvino (a country in which he lived for a considerable period of time) or the German one (where reader response theory thrived in the years that Calvino productively incorporated it in his fiction). Another choice which I have not made is to investigate more in detail the links of Calvino with female writers, such as Natalia Ginzburg, Elsa Morante, Alba de Céspedes, Lalla Romano and many others, thereby arguably reaffirming a ‘male’ canon for Calvino. I have not approached *Il visconte dimezzato* and *La giornata d’uno scrutatore* from the perspective of Disability Studies, nor have I adopted a Queer approach. Similarly, I could have paid much more attention to the editorial refusals by Calvino and the reasons behind those refusals. *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* receives much less attention from me than *Palomar*, and the *Cosmicomiche* overshadow the *Città invisibili*. I acknowledge all these and more possible observations but hope, on the contrary, that these readings might contribute to suggesting the validity of ‘other Calvinis’, of diversifying critical ideas on such a complex, worldly author and of countering established hierarchies both in Calvino criticism and in (literary) criticism more broadly.

I therefore do firmly believe in the validity of the choices made, which are suggested in large part by the preferences and biases of literary critics, who tend to divide their attention unevenly and inflate certain books and themes, whilst downplaying other aspects consciously or unconsciously. This produces critical nodes, much trafficked critical roads and even jams, and the attempt here is to figure out why this might be the case and which alternative roads (Calvino himself loved parallels and possibilities) might have been left relatively untrodden. By pointing to repetitive patterns, ideally ways should be paved towards pluralizing the image of such an allegedly versatile author. This is also the reason why I have tried to avoid adopting a single theoretical approach consistently throughout the thesis: it is my firm belief that the diverse material invites a somewhat loose but nonetheless meaningful concatenation of context-bound, historically and culturally sensitive

readings, as well as a continually shifting perspective, one that ideally extends beyond the conclusion of this thesis.

In spite of the fact that the very easiness of quoting Calvino is interrogated within this dissertation, I will not snobbishly resist the temptation here, thereby rather equivocally declaring myself immune to it. All quotes, however, pertain to a ‘minor Calvino’, a transient, stammering, imperfect, time-bound Calvino of the realm of interviews (and of one very early letter). I will also give the reader, the ‘you’, a (false?) choice as to which Calvino quote may guide the reading of these sections. The answer, most likely, is to be found somewhere in the spaces in between, in the unspoken premises that in their apparent emptiness, their deceptive ‘whiteness’, link the quotations:

‘Rifiuto comunque la parte di chi rincorre gli avvenimenti. Preferisco quella di chi continua un suo discorso, nell’attesa che torni attuale, come tutte le cose che hanno fondamento.’¹⁰ (1978)

‘Però mi capita di leggermi mentre scrivo con gli occhi di determinate persone, d’immaginarli qualcuno che so che mi legge. E so di essere letto da persone assolutamente diverse, che non hanno nulla a che vedere l’una con l’altra. Ed è questa la sfida vera. Di non avere un pubblico, ma lettori diversi. Se poi si pensa che i libri di uno scrittore sono tradotti in molti paesi (...) e che un libro è letto al di fuori dal contesto italiano, il lettore diventa veramente uno sconosciuto. Su un certo campionario di lettori Italiani posso calcolare i miei effetti. Sugli universitari americani o sui lettori dei tascabili francesi, non posso assolutamente.’¹¹ (1979)

‘L’inghilterra continua a rivisitare il proprio Pantheon di grandi figure, di un numero finito di autori. Certamente non si ha più il gusto dell’esplorazione e dell’annessione di nuovi territori.’¹² (1977)

‘Quando la finirai di pronunciare al mio cospetto frasi come queste: “tutti i mezzi son buoni pur di riuscire” “seguire la corrente” “adeguarsi ai tempi”? (...) Affermarsi (...) non vuol dire affermare un nome ed una persona. Vuol dire affermare se stesso con tutto quello che si ha dentro (...) E appunto in ciò sta la mia certezza: questo qualcosa non rappresenta l’oggi, rappresenta il domani. Ed è questo qualcosa che voglio affermare, non Italocalvino; italocalvino morirà e non servirà più a niente: il qualcosa rimarrà e darà buon seme.’¹³ (March 7, 1942)

¹⁰ Ivi, ‘Situazione 1978’, pp. 252-58, p. 252.

¹¹ Ivi, ‘Genericità della parola, esattezza della scrittura’, pp. 283-98, p. 290.

¹² Italo Calvino, ‘Lo scrittore e la tradizione’, in *Sono nato in America: interviste 1951-1985*, ed. by Luca Baranelli (Milan: Mondadori, 2012), pp. 229-45, p. 243.

¹³ Italo Calvino, *Lettere, 1945-1985*, Luca Baranelli (ed.) (Milan: Mondadori, 2000), p. 49.

‘Sono estremamente imbarazzato quando mi si parla di un disegno generale dei libri che ho scritto, che sono punti isolate: in mezzo ci sono tante giornate vuote, tante esperienze che non mi si sono concentrate in cose scritte. Quindi, come si fa?’¹⁴
(1979)

¹⁴ Ivi, p. 296.

1.1 The paradox of the dead author in media and criticism

Authorship has been amongst the most debated notions in literary criticism of the last fifty years and arguably the last centuries. Roland Barthes' famous notion of the 'Death of the Author' and Michel Foucault's elaborations on the concept of the 'author-function' have certainly not erased interest in this 'dead' figure.¹⁵ Instead, the author keeps rising from the dead and even critical traditions which reputedly bypass the author altogether, only manage to do so by surreptitiously introducing a surrogate-concept in their analyses.¹⁶ The importance of authorship or the negation thereof for literary criticism can in part be traced to notions of authorial responsibility, authority and political engagement, all of which have somehow been central in delineating the stance of critics towards Calvino's works.¹⁷ This section revisits some of the underlying issues that have been at stake in critical negotiations about the author. Instead of aiming at a full-fledged historical reconstruction of the debate concerning the 'Dead Author', theoretical implications for current critical attitudes are drawn out of the critical debates, partially by recurring to more recent research about authorship, media and celebrity. This, in turn, provides important theoretical outlines for the analysis of Calvino's authorial image that will be traced in the rest of this thesis.¹⁸

The intense debates around authorship and the nature of literary criticism that arose after Roland Barthes' famous declarations of 1968 have acquired the aura of a paradigm shift, but instead are in large part the product of deeper cultural roots and institutional backgrounds. Lawrence Rainey has convincingly argued that the pluralization and socialization of 'text' occurred already in the early twentieth century, when:

new strategies for reputation building – involving theatricality, spectacle, publicity and novel modes of cultural marketing and media manipulation – responded to

¹⁵ Nor, one should add, does this seem to have been the intention of both philosopher-critics.

¹⁶ Cf. Sean Burke, *The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998); Antoine Compagnon, *Le démon de la théorie: littérature et sens commun* (Paris: Seuil, 1998).

¹⁷ Cf. Gisèle Sapiro, 'Authorship and Responsibility: the Case of Emile Zola's Commitment in the Dreyfus' Affair', in Gillis Dorleijn, Ralf Grüttemeier and Liesbeth Korthals Altes (eds.), *Authorship Revisited: Conceptions of Authorship Around 1900 and 2000* (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), pp. 1-10.

¹⁸ Some of the principal theoretical nodes of this thesis (and especially of this first chapter) have been explored in the first instance in an article on the Italian reception of Calvino (which in turn derived from an earlier thesis). Cf. Elio Baldi, 'Italo Calvino, l'occhio che scrive: la dinamica dell'immagine autoriale di Calvino nella critica italiana', *Incontri: rivista europea di studi italiani*, 30.1 (2015), 23-33.

increasingly international cultural interchanges, the growing prominence of the early mass media, the rising pressure of advertising, the unprecedented fusion of information and entertainment, and the challenges presented by a dense, highly differentiated array of institutional arenas in which to speak to an increasingly fragmented public.

This complex combination of factors caused texts to become ever more a 'social reality, a configuration of agents and practices that converge in the production, marketing and publicization of an idiom, a shareable language in the family of twentieth-century tongues.'¹⁹ These socio-institutional conditions seem to have formed the foundation for a new type of authorship and authority alike (the two are meaningfully connected, as we will see throughout this section). Authority, as Thomas Docherty correctly observes, is always inherently dialogical, 'an effect of the interplay of various intentions', not belonging to reader or writer alone.²⁰

Similarly, Barthes' 'Death of the Author' itself is not a whimsical essay arising out of nowhere: besides the abovementioned socio-cultural causes, critical schools such as formalism had already contributed considerably towards a revision of the romantic notion of authorship.²¹ Moreover, the (in)famous article is not an isolated instance within the context of Barthes' criticism either. Barthes continued to reflect upon the notions that he had set forth, partially revising his statements in response to the contributions of other critics and writer-critics such as Calvino. In 1967, when Barthes had not yet overtly declared the author dead, Calvino already ventured a prediction in his *Cibernetica e fantasmi*: 'Ciò che sparirà sarà la figura dell'autore, questo personaggio a cui si continuano ad attribuire le funzioni che non gli competono (...) Questo personaggio anacronistico, portatore di messaggi, direttore di coscienze, dicitore di conferenze alle società culturali.'²² Antonio Rossi, however, points out the 'voluta ed esplicita autoironia' in this statement 'che veniva iterata in cinque città italiane (...) e in seguito ripetuta in altre città d'Italia, Germania, Olanda, Belgio, Inghilterra e Francia.'²³ Calvino knew Barthes' work well, but the opposite was also true, and the references are certainly no one-way

¹⁹ Lawrence Rainey, *Institutions of Modernism: Literary Elites and Public Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 4; Cf. James F. English, and John Frow, 'Literary Authorship and Celebrity Culture', in *A Concise Companion to Contemporary British Fiction*, ed. by James F. English (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2006), pp. 39-57.

²⁰ Thomas Docherty, 'Authority, History and the Question of Postmodernism', in *What is an Author?*, cit., pp. 53-71, p. 56.

²¹ Cf. Andrew Bennett, *The Author* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

²² Italo Calvino, *Saggi, 1945-1985. Vol. 1*, M. Barengi (ed.) (Milan: Mondadori, 1995), pp. 216-17.

²³ Antonio Rossi, *La narrativa italiana dal neosperimentalismo alla neoavanguardia (1950-1983)* (Roma: Lucarini, 1983), p. 5.

street.²⁴ This is emblematic for a wider exchange of critical views between critics and writers such as Calvino that belie a clear division of roles.

What Calvino refuses in the abovementioned fragment is an author-authority, a well-delineated figure that conveys clear-cut messages. The indirect dialogue between Calvino and Barthes will continue over the years, in a process of refinement of a concept that signifies, in itself, more a refutation than an affirmation. Barthes will 'respond' to Calvino not only through his article in 1968, but also in his book *S/Z*, which was published in 1970.²⁵ In it, we read the following lines:

The Author himself – that somewhat decrepit deity of the old criticism – can or could someday become a text like any other: he has only to avoid making his person the subject, the impulse, the origin, the authority, the Father, whence his work would proceed, by a channel of *expression*; he has only to see himself as being on paper and his life as bio-graphy (in the etymological sense of the word), a writing without referent, substance of a *connection* and not of a *filiation*: the critical undertaking ... will then consist in *returning* the documentary figure of the author into a novelistic, irretrievable, irresponsible figure, caught up in the plural of its own text.²⁶

This quote is very significant when considered in the light of the development of Calvino's career, a matter that will be developed in other sections. Of particular interest here are the many explicit and implicit messages that can be found in this characteristic expression of the writer-critic Roland Barthes. First of all it should be noted that Barthes is addressing both 'sides', writers and critics, alike: the actions of one group implicate – and have implications for – the other. Moreover, it becomes clear that, for Barthes, a *writer* has to adopt a certain view of his profession in order to avoid becoming an *author*: hence, what might at first have been construed as *descriptive* (the author *is* dead), reveals itself to be an unveiled *prescription* of a semi-utopian state (the author *should be* dead). In order for the author to effectively 'die', both critics and writers have to play their part in denying univocal expression and subjective origin. Lastly, an important and repeated emphasis in the passage above disengages the words from the person, who thus becomes 'irresponsible': this is a debatable stance on engagement through writing, which has in fact been called into question, most notably by feminist and postcolonial scholars.

²⁴ Consider, for example, Barthes' *La chambre claire* or his essay that introduces the French translation of *Il cavaliere inesistente* of 1984.

²⁵ Calvino also attended the seminars of Barthes on Sarrasine and Balzac that anticipated what the French philosopher writes in *S/Z*; Cf. Giorgio Patrizi, 'Calvino e la cultura francese post-strutturalista', in *Italo Calvino negli anni Sessanta*, ed. by Walter Pedullà, *L'illuminista* 34/35/36.12 (2012), pp. 153-62, p. 155.

²⁶ Cit. in: Burke, *The Death and Return of the Author*, cit., pp. 28-9.

Calvino responded to the abovementioned theoretical issues both through essays and fiction, indirectly as well as directly. These responses will be included in the analyses in other chapters, but it should be stressed here that the form of Calvino's and Barthes' criticism is strikingly similar, and part of a bigger cultural phenomenon, that has brought criticism and fiction closer to one another. Both Calvino and Barthes clearly favour the format of the essay. Essayism is a form of criticism that is filtered through personality and inevitably reveals the presence of an author (it is therefore not surprising that successful essayists become critical points of reference themselves, with a distinct and often authoritative 'voice'). Moreover, writers have become increasingly active as critics, erasing the lines between the two roles, a development of which Calvino is certainly a prime example.²⁷ Recently, various Italian scholars have even welcomed Calvino's fluid essayistic writing as a sort of *exemplum* of a new form of criticism that corresponds to a changing world.²⁸ This essayism of Barthes has been openly challenged by Pierre Bourdieu in his book *Homo Academicus*, and the reasons for this resonate strongly with debates around Calvino. For Bourdieu, Barthes represents 'the peak of the class of essayists, who, having nothing to oppose to the forces of the field, are condemned, in order to exist, or subsist, to float with the tides of the external or internal force which wrack the milieu, notably through journalism.' Later, even more tellingly, Bourdieu adds:

Roland Barthes gives instantaneous expression to all the changes in the forces of the field while appearing to anticipate them, and in this respect it is sufficient to follow his itinerary, and his successive enthusiasms, to discover all the tensions which were applied to the point of the least resistance of the field, where what is called fashion continually flowers.²⁹

A fashion that Calvino has certainly followed is the strategy of the multiplication of the author. According to the theories of Barthes, this strategy leads to an erasure of the biographical person that traditionally had been accepted as the (sole) 'originator', the 'auctor' of a work. Critics have frequently caught upon this aspect of Calvino's

²⁷ Cf. Anna Dolfi (ed.), *La saggistica degli scrittori* (Rome: Bulzoni Editore, 2012); Claire de Obaldia, *The Essayistic Spirit* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 56.

²⁸ Cf. Andrea Cortellessa, *Libri segreti: autori-critici nel Novecento italiano* (Florence: Le Lettere, 2008), pp. 26-33, p. 44; Graziella Pulce, 'Elogio della discontinuità: di alcuni tratti della scrittura saggistica nella letteratura italiana novecentesca', in *Il saggio: forme e funzioni di un genere letterario*, ed. by Giulia Cantarutti, Luisa Avellini and Silvia Albertazzi (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2008), pp. 113-33; Emanuele Zinato, *Le idee e le forme: la critica letteraria in Italia dal 1900 ai giorni nostri* (Rome: Carocci, 2010), pp. 164-72.

²⁹ Pierre Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1984), p. xxii.

(creative) writings as (I would argue) Calvino wanted them to.³⁰ The question is, however, if this erasure of the person behind the decentred text is effectively what is happening, and if so, if it is as straightforward as the neat fusion of theory into practice implies. Simona Vannini argues that Calvino's adoption of the strategy of multiplication might just as easily be construed as an attempt to *survive* the death of the author. According to Vannini, the Ligurian writer is not merely reproducing the debate that centred around Barthes, Foucault, Kristeva and others, but also exposing the ambiguities of that debate, thereby relativizing its most radical consequences and actually reintroducing the author.³¹ Brian McHale points to a similar counterintuitive logic when he writes about postmodernist writers: 'Paradoxically, the more they sought to efface themselves, the more they made their presence conspicuous. Strategies of self-effacement, while ostensibly obliterating surface traces of the author, in fact call attention to the author as *strategist*.' 'Oeuvre', McHale states, is the author in disguise.³²

Many substitutes have been proposed as replacements of the author, through the introduction of terms that are intrinsically and often consciously paradoxical, such as Ricoeur's 'intention of the text' or Eco's 'intentio operis'. By referring to *intention*, however, the departure from a literary model of an originating 'auctor' is somewhat halfhearted. The author can take on a whole range of other guises, such as the 'indeterminate thought', the structures of thought, time and space that underlie the text: in other words, the non-existent author can be proposed as the *coherence* of the text. This coherence is indispensable for literary taxonomies, especially those that do not classify (anymore) in terms of genre. Another similar option is borrowed from art history, namely to reduce the author to a 'signature'.³³ Nonetheless, the proposed coherence cannot coincide with a pluralized textual corpus that 'belongs to no one',

³⁰ Cf. Raffaele Donnarumma, *Da lontano: Calvino, la semiologia, lo strutturalismo* (Palermo: Palumbo, 2008), p. 167.

³¹ Simona Vannini, 'Flann O'Brien and Italo Calvino: The Author as a Multiple Self' in *Twenty Years after: an 'Irish' Calvino?* (Turin; Dublin: Trauben, 2007).

³² Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (New York: Methuen, 1987), pp. 199-200. Cf. Carla Benedetti, *L'ombra lunga dell'autore: indagine su una figura cancellata* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1999), p.11.

³³ Cf. Karin Gludovatz, *Fährten legen – Spuren lesen: Die Künstlersignatur als Poietische Referenz* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2011).

thus creating a tension in literary theory. The author therefore is still present as a spectre in literary studies, albeit in different guises and under different names.³⁴

Almost all of these author-surrogates have been considered at some point by Calvino in fiction and in essays. An important text in preparation of the theoretically dense *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore* is *La squadratura*, an introduction that Calvino wrote to a volume of the works of Giulio Paolini in 1975. A reference to this essay has become almost inevitable when talking about Calvino's self-effacing strategies, a fact that in itself is highly revelatory in the context of the argument here. Calvino writes about the admiration of the writer with respect to the painter who has the 'firma' to hide behind. This is fairly common knowledge in Calvino criticism. Nevertheless, Calvino is immediately offering a problematization of this, which is often overlooked: 'la via verso l'impersonalità riporta il pittore a tirare in ballo l'io, sia pure un io cartesiano, categorico, grammaticale, anonimo (...) E se proprio questa fosse la via per liberare l'io dalla corpulenta pesantezza dell'autobiografia individuale?'.³⁵ Calvino thus recognizes that with the loss of one 'I', another 'I' makes its entrance, inevitably. The signature does not simply denote the void that the author is craving, but a construction, a mask, that still serves as a signifier (albeit more remotely and indirectly) for the 'original' I, and it is still true that the 'author authors the 'author''.³⁶ At the end of the essay, Calvino writes the following revealing lines:

Le sue opere diventano racconto (...) una storia che un critico ha seguito fase per fase in un libro che costituisce un elemento complementare alla serie delle opere, quasi il loro tessuto connettivo continuo. Del resto questo tessuto si basa soprattutto sulle dichiarazioni del pittore, sul discorso continuo con cui egli colma la discontinuità tra un'opera e l'altra.³⁷

Calvino argues that Paolini's works (but he is clearly using himself as mirror) form a sort of meta-discourse that includes critical readings as well as the painter's declarations. Hence, discontinuity becomes continuity, and the required coherence of the author-substitute is reached. In this way, critic and writer/painter establish an

³⁴ Compagnon, *Le démon de la théorie*, cit., pp. 68, 78-81.

³⁵ Calvino, *Saggi. Vol 2.*, cit., pp. 1981-1990, p. 1985.

³⁶ Wernick, 'Authorship, and the Supplement of Promotion', cit., p. 87.

³⁷ Calvino, *Saggi. Vol. 2*, cit., p. 1989.

author-surrogate together.³⁸ In an interview in 1966 Calvino stated similarly that ‘c’è un gioco infantile nel quale si presenta una serie di punti con dei numeri: unendoli con un tratto si ottiene un disegno. Credo che unendo così tutti i miei libri, si otterrà una figura precisa: la mia’.³⁹ In other words, Calvino in various contributions presents the outlines of an idea that resembles Wayne Booth’s concept of the *career-author*, ‘the sustained creative center implied by a sequence of implied authors’.⁴⁰ This type of overarching author that binds together fragments of text has been proposed more often by poetry critics. Lawrence Lipking, for example, argues that the figure of the poet is first and foremost invented by the poet himself, a process that involves reading and writing contemporaneously in a tradition of other poets. In Lipking’s view, critics contribute to the creation of the figure of the poet: ‘in our criticism of any author who creates a career-author (...) or whose public creates for him an independent “character”, there comes a time when received opinions about these two can blur our vision of any one of his actual achievements; for the critic may either praise the work for virtues that are really in earlier works or overlook valuable qualities because the “image” has turned ugly’.⁴¹ A sharper image of the whole can thus cancel out certain details or composite parts.

Calvino’s self-aware meta-comments on the artistic process, as well as the logic of palimpsest and pastiche that underlies his (later) writings, have often been compared to postmodernist attitudes towards authorship. However, one does not necessarily or exclusively have to search for such attitudes amongst postmodernists: modernists anticipated many of Calvino’s stances, and understandably so, since they already got caught up in a similar logic of mediatic self-representation. Modernist writers, like Calvino, ‘hid’ behind their writings, promoting merely what Aaron Jaffe has called their ‘authorial imprimaturs’, which he defines as ‘durable promotional vehicles for their careers, hybridizing bodily agency and textual form.’ During the

³⁸ Calvino’s choice of Giulio Paolini is very appropriate, as we can gather from the discussion of Paolini in terms of the death of the author in: Craig Owens, ‘From Work to Frame, or, Is There Life After “The Death of the Author”?’ in *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 122-39, pp. 123-24. Cf. also the recent: Giulio Paolini, *L’artista che credeva di esistere* (Milan: Johan & Levi, 2012).

³⁹ Calvino, *Sono nato*, cit., p. 125.

⁴⁰ Wayne Booth, *Critical Understanding: the Powers and Limits of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 270; For Calvino’s explicit references to Booth (as well as to Barthes and Foucault), cf. Christine Wilhelm, *Vermittler durch Verrat: eine Analyse literarischer Translatorfiguren in Texten von Jorge Luis Borges, Italo Calvino und Leonardo Sciascia* = *Traduttore traditore* (Trier: WVT, 2010), pp. 75-77.

⁴¹ Lawrence Lipking, *The Life of the Poet: Beginning and Ending Poetic Careers* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 319.

last decades, modernists have increasingly been scrutinized by critics for the paradoxes between their discourses of self-effacement as opposed to the self-marketing with which they turned their names and ‘signatures’ into authorial equivalents of ‘brands’.⁴² Jaffe suggests that there are parallels in the functional logic behind these ‘imprimaturs’ and more recent star images: ‘Like the star image, the textual imprimatur is a metonym for its subject, a metonym that represents it as an object for cultural production, circulation and consumption.’⁴³ Jaffe calls these ‘imprimaturs’ alternately ‘authorial’ and ‘textual’, which is consistent with his definition of a hybrid between body and text. Moreover, this hybridity is in line with contentions of theorists on celebrity culture, posture and discourse analysis, as we will see below. More importantly, however, Jaffe concisely formulates the functional, metonymic nature of the imprimatur: in order to circulate, to become ‘common knowledge’, an imprimatur has to be reductive, a mere metonym. Although generally less immediately ‘consumable’ by a large public than a star image, the textual imprimatur is arguably precisely there for the critic to be picked up, to be noticed and amplified. In highly mediatized times ‘literary fortune’, which centres in large part around the circulation of these imprimaturs, can be said to dissolve some borders between critics and public.⁴⁴

The contention that the discreet and indirect creation of authorial images concerns readers and critics alike does not merely ‘naturally’ derive from changed socio-historical circumstances. Since it bears a highly sociological stamp, this reading is, itself, the product of a different way of conceiving literature in society that in part has its roots in Pierre Bourdieu’s work on distinction. My reading is crucially informed by this change in critical thinking, that does not allow for singularity and isolation. The critical watershed that Bourdieu and others brought about is clarified by Jean-Pierre Martin:

It [the literary] was a space of “essential solitude”, where, like Kafka, one was nothing more than literary (...) At the antipodes of this insulated place, he [Bourdieu] responded with another space, well-situated (...) a “microcosm” that is both *relational* and *differential* and where no writer could be alone, since he occupied as if despite

⁴² Cf. English and Frow, ‘Literary Authorship’, cit., p. 43.

⁴³ Aaron Jaffe, *Modernism and the Culture of Celebrity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 1-3.

⁴⁴ Cf. Gian Carlo Ferretti, *La fortuna letteraria* (Pesaro: Transeuropea, 1988), pp. 7-8.

himself a position. That way, all claimed solitude appeared only as a social attitude – the effect of an opposition and a confrontation.⁴⁵

Bourdieu's ideas in this respect are relatable to the more common literary concept of intertextuality, except for the fact that Bourdieu emphasizes time and again that all writing should be considered in a relational *as well as* differential manner, and his thesis, being sociological, is not restricted to the 'written world'. It is therefore not enough for Bourdieu to establish that 'no text is an island': for him, authors and texts stand in an antagonistic relationship to one another, in a cultural field that functions through distinctions (and could not function otherwise).⁴⁶ Bourdieu can be said to complement sociologically the more hermeneutically informed theories of Hans-Georg Gadamer, who in his *Wahrheit und Methode* of 1960 presents insights that, albeit formulated in very different terms and stemming from completely different disciplinary and cultural traditions, seem to address a similar core. In his discussion of the role of tradition in interpretation, Gadamer points to the functionality of tradition, which can never be ignored: writing is framed by tradition, a tradition that it can set out to reshape, but can never simply *ignore*. This is true for everyone, including critics, who accordingly mirror the oppositions and contrasts that characterize the field of artistic creations and expressions. Bourdieu's 'distinction' operates in a society of which the institutions and norms are crucially shaped by tradition. His arguments stem from a sociological viewpoint, whilst Gadamer's arguments are rooted in the philosophical tradition of hermeneutics. Both, however, undermine the possibility of disinterested critical readings in a vacuum, outside society or tradition.⁴⁷

Gadamerian tradition and Bourdieu's distinction are negotiated in large part via networks of persons and technology which we tend to sum up under the general term 'media'. This becomes even more true in the course of the twentieth century, when the availability of various media with a large scope offers new technological and distributional opportunities to reach large numbers of people. This institutionalized cultural phenomenon has brought about an increasing presence of

⁴⁵ Jean-Pierre Martin, *Bourdieu et la littérature* (Nantes: Cécile Defaut, 2010), p. 16; Translations from French are mine, unless stated otherwise.

⁴⁶ Cf. Pierre Bourdieu, *La distinction: critique sociale du jugement* (Paris: Éditions du Minuit, 1979); Pierre Bourdieu, *Les règles de l'art: genèse et structure du champ littéraire* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1992).

⁴⁷ Cf. Hans Robert Jauss, *Towards an Aesthetic of Reception* (Brighton: Harvester, 1982), pp. 5, 14, 52, 63-69.

celebrities, who ‘perform in their primary art form (...) as well as the extra-textual dimensions of interviews, advertisements/commercial endorsements, award nights and premieres.’⁴⁸ Scholars of what is often called a ‘celebrity society’ have argued that the multiplication of star phenomena is related, amongst other things, to social fragmentation, the eclipse of universal models and the demand, in complex societies, for simplification through personalization.⁴⁹ Similarly, according to Chris Rojek, celebrities are ‘cultural fabrications’ whose personalities are ‘concocted’ by ‘cultural intermediaries’ and who subsequently undergo ‘productive assimilation by the audience that consumes them’.⁵⁰ These insights can prove enlightening in the context analyzed here, even if two further steps will have to be made: firstly, to apply the above to *literary* celebrity, that is not necessarily restricted to current society or modern media. This has been done in more recent criticism with some regularity. The second aspect still seems to be less obvious: critics, too, are part of ‘celebrity society’, and even choose their own ‘celebrities’. The (unconscious) influence of their knowledge of the celebrity ‘persona’ – and their judgement thereof – should be critically assessed, since it is bound to result in certain stereotypical, fossilized responses.⁵¹

An interesting aspect of this ‘celebrity culture’ is the dialogic nature of the construction of artistic ‘personae’: critics and stars establish these in conjunction, in a dialogue which is merely rendered explicit in interviews. This is not to say that both ‘sides’ openly collaborate, in a straightforward, unproblematic manner, in this construction: relations between critics and artists can, of course, be openly antagonistic. One could even say that critics and artists are seldom each other’s main addressees in this dialogue: both are talking to an ‘audience’ which includes but is by no means restricted to each other. In this respect the dialogue is more often than not purely functional and ancillary.⁵² Nonetheless, this too is part of the critical

⁴⁸ P. David Marshall, ‘The Promotion and Presentation of the Self: Celebrity as Marker of Presentational Media’, *Celebrity Studies* 1.1 (2010), 35-48, p. 39.

⁴⁹ Cf. Stephen Gundle, ‘Fame, Fashion and Style’, in *Italian Cultural Studies: an Introduction*, ed. by David Forgacs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 309-26, p. 322.

⁵⁰ Cit. in Joanna Morrison, ‘Dorian’s ‘Look’: Jean-Paul Sartre and the Divided Celebrity’, *Celebrity Studies*, 5.1-2 (2014), 45-58, p. 47.

⁵¹ Revealingly, in a special issue on ‘audience’ of *Celebrity Studies* (Volume 6, Issue 1, 2015) no attention was paid to ‘critical celebrity’, a term which does not seem to have taken root in criticism yet. The closest equivalent is probably Jeffrey Williams’ term ‘academostars’, cf. Williams, ‘Academostars’, cit., pp. 371-88.

⁵² Cf. Gérard Genette, *Seuils* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1987), p. 328; Philippe Lejeune, *Je est un autre: l'autobiographie de la littérature aux médias* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1980), pp. 103-20.

negotiation of an image, of an artistic mask, of the ‘coherence’ that critics strive to find in a corpus. This state of affairs frequently produces a form of ‘mediated self-estrangement’ that can have an ‘impoverishing effect’ on an artist who is ‘systematically and inaccurately mirrored’ because ‘recognition and confirmation are given only to those aspects of the personality of the object that are in accord with the projected images.’⁵³ Accordingly, certain ‘readings’ will present themselves more readily to a community of ‘interpreters’ – be it an audience or critics – and through their higher visibility will leave other aspects of the ‘persona’ unacknowledged.⁵⁴ In Wernick’s words this ‘vortex of promotional signs’ in its extreme form can become a ‘great, swirling stream of signifiers whose only meaning in the end is the circulatory process which it anticipates, represents and impels.’⁵⁵ This statement almost seems the critical mirror image of Calvino’s *cosmicomiche* ‘un segno nello spazio’.⁵⁶ The impulse to control the dissemination of works and secure the disinterestedness of the ‘creator’ vis-à-vis the work is experienced even by ‘academostars’ such as Judith Butler.⁵⁷

In French literary criticism, the branch of research that is called ‘analyse du discours’ has paid considerable attention to the image of the author and the ‘discursive ethos’ through which she or he presents himself. The term ‘ethos’ stems from classical rhetoric, and is traditionally associated with the person that is behind the words and negotiated through them: the audience will take that person and what they know about her or him into account, and the speaker will surely recognize and address this in some way. ‘Image of the author’ has been proposed as a term for this *response* to ethos, and points to the image that others have created of the author. In this thesis, such a distinction will be avoided as much as possible to stress the fundamental interdependence of the two poles, the dialogical or even polyphonous nature of both ethos and the image of the author, which are never just the product of one of the ‘sides’. Furthermore, I agree with Ruth Amossy when she writes that ‘the recognition of the double character of the image of the author introduces the idea of a

⁵³ Morrison, ‘Dorian’s ‘Look’’, cit., p. 52.

⁵⁴ Cf. Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *Contingencies of Value: Alternative Perspectives for Critical Theory* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 10-11.

⁵⁵ Wernick, ‘Authorship’, cit., p. 121.

⁵⁶ Cf. Carla Benedetti, ‘Calvino e i segni dell’autore’, in *Piccole finzioni con importanza: valori della narrativa italiana contemporanea*, ed. by Nathalie Roelens and Inge Lanslots (Ravenna: Longo, 1993), pp. 79-101.

⁵⁷ Williams, Op. cit., pp. 374-75.

circulation that breaches the often posited dichotomy between a literary theory and poetics, between the text and what is outside of the text [le hors-texte]'.⁵⁸

A theoretical elaboration of this interdependency is offered by Jérôme Meizoz' notion of 'posture', which denotes the representation of a writer or artist both through non-verbal behaviour and written discourse and strives to combine insights from sociology and rhetorics.⁵⁹ Meizoz explains his idea of posture as follows:

Posture is not uniquely an author's own construction, but an interactive process: the image is co-constructed by the author and various mediators (journalists, criticism, biographies) serving the reading public. Posture begins from the moment of publication – at the publisher's therefore – and involves the very presentation of the book (size, cover, etcetera).⁶⁰

This concept is particularly valuable in Calvino's case, since the Cuba-born writer proved such a successful mediator (understood both in terms of 'medium for messages' and 'user of media') himself. Nevertheless, a remark about Meizoz' quote is in place: his 'serving the reading public' seems to emphasize a reputedly 'naïve' public, that 'falls' for the 'posture' that others have created. However, one does not have to be 'naïve' to undergo the influence of posture: to experience the effects of posture it is enough to live in a society. Consequently, critics are no less receptive to these 'postures': at best, they 'read' and interpret postures in different manners and adopt different attitudes towards them. Meizoz refers to 'journalists', but not to 'critics': in this case, he reverts to the term criticism. Critics, however, are not just part of the disembodied, amorphous mass of 'criticism': in some respect, as individuals living in a society, they are also part of the 'reading public'. In this thesis, critics are very much seen as *readers*.

The relation between the notion of 'posture' and Bourdieu's sociology becomes clear from the fact that Meizoz considers the range of available postures to be limited. The choice of postures that are buried in the collective memory of the

⁵⁸ Ruth Amossy, 'La double nature de l'image d'auteur', *Argumentation et Analyse du Discours [En Ligne]* (2009), URL: <http://aad.revues.org/662>.

⁵⁹ Jérôme Meizoz, 'Modern Posterities of Posture: Jean-Jacques Rousseau', in *Authorship Revisited*, cit., pp. 81-93, p. 84.

⁶⁰ Meizoz, 'Modern Posterities of Posture', cit., p. 84.

literary field is limited, and every posture corresponds to a position-taking.⁶¹ Calvino seems to hint at something similar when he writes:

Ora io credo che la poetica d'un autore si deve ricavare a posteriori dalle sue opere, cioè da quello che è riuscito veramente a *fare*; le dichiarazioni d'intenzioni documentano solo delle opzioni che in un dato momento uno fa sue volontariamente tra le varie possibilità che gli sono offerte dal ventaglio delle posizioni intellettuali, politico-letterari, etc.⁶²

The idea that poetics should be established 'a posteriori', on the basis of the texts, is in itself interesting, and in line with what a colleague writer-critic such as Umberto Eco writes about poetics and stated authorial intentions. In the last instance this take on poetics goes back to Benedetto Croce.⁶³ This will be discussed in later sections, most notably 1.2 and 2.1. The 'opzioni' and 'ventaglio delle posizioni' that Calvino mentions are remarkably similar to what Meizoz and Bourdieu write, respectively, about posture and distinction. One could argue that this does not matter, because authorial intention is (or, rather, *should be*) of no importance (as Calvino himself paradoxically argues, by claiming that one should 'look at the text'). The argument throughout this thesis will be, however, that authorial intention does matter, if not in the traditional way: what matters is the way in which intention is 'faked' by writers and critics alike. Writers put on masks, take on styles, follow, neglect or mock tendencies, fashions, modes and genres. Critics, on their part, *do the same* and read 'coherence' in works to make sense of them, to systematize in a larger literary and cultural context: 'In offering a work, he [the author] constructs a self-image and this image is confirmed or evolves in the course of ensuing works: Gide is expected to 'do Gide' while at the same time he must be neither completely different nor wholly identical in subsequent books (and likewise for everyone).'⁶⁴ The 'intentio operis' therefore, in my view, is not the exclusive domain of authors, but neither of readers, nor can such a distinction really be made: authors are also readers and readers (at least critics) are authors. Both critics and writers operate in what Bourdieu termed the 'space of possibles' that delimits the possibilities of different postures that one can adopt, or read into a textual corpus.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Ivi, pp. 81, 85. Cf. Amossy, 'La double nature', cit., p. 10.

⁶² Cit. in: Mario Barenghi, *Italo Calvino: le linee e i margini* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2007), p. 273.

⁶³ Cf. Benedetti, *L'ombra lunga dell'autore*, cit., p. 41.

⁶⁴ Meizoz, Op. cit., p. 84.

⁶⁵ Bourdieu, *La distinction*, cit.

As we will see in section 1.3 with the case of Calvino and Palomar, writers often coexist with their characters in the media, and characters can become an important part of the image of the author. Partially, this is because the construction of an author-image follows a parallel process to that of the construction of a characters' outlines in any reader's mind.⁶⁶ In the most extreme form, this coexistence can lead to 'lived fiction', which is the case when a writer behaves like the character he created or in accordance with the 'values' inherent in the text or texts for which he is most famous.⁶⁷ John Rodden has traced this process intriguingly in the case of an English twentieth-century writer whose reputational history resembles that of Calvino in many ways: George Orwell. Rodden describes how Orwell has become a cultural 'type', a myth that is strongly bound to his fictional works and essays. The plain, short, 'simple' style of Orwell is at the same time unique and inimitable as well as worthy of emulation. The man has become a myth and in the process has transcended the problem of paradox, his character and moral seem directly and tangibly present in his style: 'the myth of "Orwell" has to do with the impression that he inhabits these roles [as ascribed by his readers] naturally, indeed that these roles are quintessentially "Orwell"'.⁶⁸ However, since these 'postures' are never unique, their workings can be traced in different social, cultural and historical situations, with respect to different 'horizons of expectation', in Gadamerian terms. Recognizable signatures like 'Orwell' or 'Italo Calvino' are not quintessentially singular, but instead made up of several available postures. To name just one example: when responding to the ideas of the 'Death of the Author', Calvino is, partially through Barthes, reusing a posture that has been popularized by Mallarmé, the poet who denied being an author. Such intertextual references to literary tradition and acknowledged models are a way to 'cue readers' about the ethos or posture that one is adopting, and thus about how, or at least in which framework, to read and value their work.⁶⁹ This is, again, even more true for critics, who are more likely, and even to a certain extent trained, to pick up on these clues. Significantly, Mallarmé – whom we might call the 'face of effacement' – was an

⁶⁶ Tom Kindt and Hans-Harald Müller, *The Implied Author: Concept and Controversy* (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2006), p. 103.

⁶⁷ Cf. Morrison, *Op. cit.*, p. 51.

⁶⁸ Rodden, *The Politics of Literary Reputation*, *cit.*, p. 257.

⁶⁹ Liesbeth Korthals Altes, 'Slippery Author Figures: Ethos and Value Regimes: Houellebecq, a Case', in *Authorship Revisited*, *cit.*, pp. 95-117, p. 98. Cf. Benedetti, *L'ombra lunga dell'autore*, *cit.*, p. 25.

excellent example of a writer who, through alleged self-effacement, was actually a fervent self-promotor engaged in ‘self-branding’.⁷⁰

It is therefore not enough to describe a posture, it needs to be contextualized historically, culturally and theoretically to be critically enlightening: ‘Posture is only significant in relation to the position that an author effectively occupies in the space of literary positions of the moment. That is why one cannot content oneself with describing the most visible or cosmetic elements of a posture, as if dealing with an intentional staging.’⁷¹ The following is an attempt to deal in this way with the case of the critical response to Italo Calvino: a response not to his works, not to his person, but to the hybrid of body and text that determines his textual/authorial imprimatur.

⁷⁰ Arild Michel Bakken, ‘Textual Self-Branding: The Rhetorical Ethos in Mallarmé’s Divagations’, *Authorship* 1.1 (2011).

⁷¹ Jérôme Meizoz, *Postures littéraires*, cit., p. 21; Cf. Rodden, *The Politics of Literary Reputation*, cit., p. 51.

1.2 The presence of the author. Style, coherence, essays and prefaces.

An inherent paradox in Calvino's authorial self-presentation has received growing critical attention during the past decades. As Rocco Capozzi has noted: 'For a writer who loved his privacy, who stayed away from literary prizes and who disliked literary groups, Italo Calvino made himself quite "public" through an abundance of interviews, introductions to his own and other writer's works and through numerous literary essays and journalistic notes.'⁷² Domenico Scarpa has extended this contradiction to the autobiographical substratum that is identifiable in Calvino's stories:

Il Calvino che gioca a nascondersi, che cerca di eliminare il *self* dalle sue storie, che occulta la propria identità, è un'immagine che i lettori ben conoscono. Eppure il suo atteggiamento è strano: si nasconde, e un attimo dopo grida 'Mi sono nascosto!', come quei bambini che non si sa se godono di più a restare tutto il pomeriggio nel loro nascondiglio o a farsi scoprire subito. Il Calvino autobiografico è tutto in questa contraddizione.⁷³

A working hypothesis throughout this thesis is that such a stance towards autobiography is critically relevant, that it forms part of the 'text' that we read (even in the somewhat unlikely case that our knowledge of this authorial attitude does not at least partially precede knowledge of the text). In the past, critics have taken the person Calvino and his autobiographical stances into account in critical (e)valuations of his work. When academic readers explicitly address the topic, their judgement is often in line with Franco Fortini's main point of criticism towards Calvino. Fortini blamed Calvino for being something of a sell-out, prostituting himself subtly but shamelessly in order to entice more readers.⁷⁴ Similarly, Franco Ricci writes in his introduction to a recent volume about teaching the works of Italo Calvino: 'He was, in a sense, an opportunistic writer, using his talent to create the occasion for fame, using his fame to situate himself at the forefront of literary popularity.'⁷⁵ Although the word 'fame' is hardly used when discussing Calvino, he is, undeniably, one of

⁷² Rocco Capozzi, 'Cosmicomiche vecchie e nuove: Keeping in Tune with the Times', in *Calvino Revisited*, ed. by Franco Ricci (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1989), pp. 65-84, p. 65.

⁷³ Domenico Scarpa, *Italo Calvino* (Milan: Mondadori, 1999), p. 65.

⁷⁴ Mario Barenghi, *Italo Calvino*, cit., pp. 189-97; Cf. Vittorio Spinazzola, 'L'io diviso di Italo Calvino', *Italo Calvino: atti del convegno internazionale: Firenze, Palazzo Medici-Riccardi 26-28 febbraio 1987*, ed. by Giovanni Falaschi (Florence: Garzanti, 1988), pp. 87-112, p. 89.

⁷⁵ Franco Ricci (ed.), *Approaches to Teaching the Works of Italo Calvino* (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2013), p. 17.

the most famous Italian writers of the twentieth century, and – being an editor – he lived, as he said himself, ‘in mezzo alla fabbrica della gloria letteraria’.⁷⁶

The core of Calvino’s ‘critical fame’ is a paradox that can be summarized as Calvino’s ‘visible invisibility’ and the text that epitomizes this coexistence of apparently incompatible poles of a semantic spectrum is his *Se una notte d’inverno un viaggiatore*.⁷⁷ Traditionally, this work seems to have been interpreted somewhat too literally or one-sidedly. A large number of critics have understood the novel as a fairly clear-cut promotion of the primacy of reading over writing.⁷⁸ Many books and articles have used the large amount of explicit references in the book to the Death of the Author and reader response theory to argue that the rise of the reader comes at the expense of the author.⁷⁹ However, later critical analyses have tended to propose a more complex reading of the relation between text and author, arguing that, even though the text cannot be controlled by the author, neither can it be controlled by others. Therefore, the supposed monopoly of the reader has not convinced several scholars. According to Joseph Francese, for example, Calvino is not abdicating as author, but, on the contrary, presenting himself as ‘privileged first reader’.⁸⁰ Calvino seems to condition the reader just as much as he ‘sets him free’, obsessively and aprioristically framing the reader and his response.⁸¹ Therefore, Melissa Watts questions the birth of the reader as well as the death of the author and goes as far as theorizing an opposite intention (notice how easily intention has become part of what the text ‘does’ with the reader), another message that Calvino directs towards critics. Calvino, according to Watts, wants to have critics *notice* the author, who is explicitly

⁷⁶ Calvino, *Sono nato*, cit., p. 99.

⁷⁷ JoAnn Cannon, *Italo Calvino: Writer and Critic* (Ravenna: Longo, 1981), pp. 63-64.

⁷⁸ Melissa Watts, ‘Reinscribing a Dead Author in *If On a Winter’s Night a Traveler*’, *Modern Fiction Studies*, 37.4 (1991), 705-15, p. 709.

⁷⁹ Cf. JoAnn Cannon, *Italo Calvino*, cit., 104; Marshall Olds, ‘Another Book, Another Author: Calvino, Flaubert, Mallarmé’, *The Review of Contemporary Fiction*, 6.2 (1986), 117-23, p. 120; Madeleine Sorapure, ‘Being in the Midst: Italo Calvino’s “If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler”’, *Modern Fiction Studies*, 31.4 (1985), pp. 702-10; Giuseppe Maiorino, *First Pages: a Poetics of Titles* (London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008), pp. 273-77.

⁸⁰ Joseph Francese, *Narrating Postmodern Time and Space* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1997), p. 10.

⁸¹ Mariolina Salvatori, ‘Italo Calvino’s “If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler”: Writer’s Authority, Reader’s Autonomy’, *Contemporary Literature*, 27.2 (1986), 182-212, p. 210; Cf. Gian Carlo Ferretti, *Il best seller all’italiana: fortune e formule del romanzo ‘di qualità’* (Rome: Laterza, 1983), p. 75.

reinscribed in the text: 'Calvino's use of metafiction is not concerned with the errors of traditional fiction but with those of contemporary criticism.'⁸²

Whether one agrees with this reading or not, *Se una notte* is a highly complicated text, which does not seem to allow for a clear-cut 'victory' of author or reader.⁸³ Rather, the problematization of the dichotomy seems to be the main outcome of the text. Moreover, a text that so explicitly deals with the nature of both authorship and readership and even editorial issues, foregrounds posture in a way that is almost impossible to ignore. In fact, a large part of the critical responses to the text can be read as an elaborate game of 'find Italo Calvino': a game that Calvino explicitly and repeatedly invites his readers to play, arguably because he 'intuisce con straordinaria acutezza come la figura dell'autore e la sua persistenza in immagine non sono solo un fenomeno di mercato (...) ma siano iscritte e radicate negli stessi meccanismi della fruizione e della lettura.'⁸⁴ In this book, Calvino is definitely 'something between a trickster, an artist in ambush, a puppeteer and a secret admirer who wishes to keep us on our toes.'⁸⁵ The best example of this is perhaps the inherent contradiction in Beno Weiss' explanation of *Se una notte*: although he argues that the book reflects the 'centrality of the text vis-à-vis the author' as well as the 'primacy of the reader', two pages later he contends that Calvino 'compels us to deal with him on his own inexorable terms'.⁸⁶ It seems that there is little freedom of movement for the reader after all. This subtle conditioning of the reader is not new, even though it is rendered much more explicit in *Se una notte*. Sergio Pautasso already in 1973 writes that Calvino 'lascia al lettore l'illusione di poter disporre liberamente della propria lettura: in realtà egli lo guida lungo i meandri della narrazione con un filo invisibile che tiene ben saldo'.⁸⁷ We are thus faced with an ambivalent gesture, with a paradoxical 'authorization' by the author to

⁸² Watts, 'Reinscribing a Dead Author', cit., p. 214. Cf. Benedetti, *L'ombra lunga dell'autore*, cit., p. 163.

⁸³ A fruitful comparison might be made with Luigi Pirandello's *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore* and the complex dynamics that arise which do not at all make for a simple 'displacement' of the author.

⁸⁴ Benedetti, *L'ombra lunga dell'autore*, cit., p. 17.

⁸⁵ Albert Howard Carter, *Italo Calvino: Metamorphoses of Fantasy* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1987), p. 11. Cf. Inge Fink, 'The Power behind the Pronoun: Narrative Games in Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 37.1 (1991), 93-104.

⁸⁶ Beno Weiss, *Understanding Italo Calvino* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), pp. 132, 134.

⁸⁷ Sergio Pautasso, 'Favola, allegoria, utopia nell'opera di Italo Calvino', *Nuovi argomenti*, 33-34 (1973), 67-91, p. 91.

a free reading.⁸⁸ In other words, *Se una notte* represents a ‘percorso ermeneutico ‘ribaltato’ all’interno del quale un esempio di ‘pratica’ letteraria legge ed interpreta i discorsi della ‘teoria’ mettendoli ironicamente in discussione ma anche chiarendone alcuni risvolti’.⁸⁹

Calvino’s hyperliterary metafiction (or, even, ‘hypermetafiction’) in *Se una notte* is not only directed to readers, but also to critics (if such a distinction need in fact be made).⁹⁰ This has been a common practice in Calvino’s essays and fiction, which, in turn, has earned him the abovementioned reputation among critics, who have often remarked that the writer is trying to belie their definitions, to put their neat categorizations in disarray.⁹¹ The writer who, according to Alberto Asor Rosa writes always and never about himself at the same time, gives definitions that are almost never the final word on the topic and are frequently completely overturned: ‘così molte volte il lettore, davanti a una formula folgorante di definizione, riconosce soddisfatto quella che si attaglia definitivamente all’autore: “questo è Calvino!”’, “così lavora Calvino”; e Calvino, sornione e mesto invece è già altrove, in altra precisa e fedele definizione cioè contraddicendosi consapevolmente.’⁹² One of the Gordian Knots of Calvino criticism that are rarely directly addressed, is the fact that he presents himself always anew as ‘new’, but at the same time as consistent. Gian Carlo Ferretti argues that this is in part due to Calvino’s work as editor of himself and others, a line of thought that will be developed too in this thesis.⁹³ This oft repeated combination of contrasts has turned Calvino’s textual corpus into a ‘continuum-labirinto’ in which a perennial oscillation between unity and fragmentation takes place.⁹⁴

⁸⁸ Cf. Maria De Toni, ‘Cornice narrativa e dissoluzione del récit in Italo Calvino’, *Studi Novecenteschi: Rivista Semestrale di Storie della Letteratura Italiana Contemporanea*, 34.73 (2007), 169-94, p. 186.

⁸⁹ Francesca Di Blasio, *Teoria e pratiche dello sguardo: percorsi nella letteratura inglese e americana* (Bergamo: Bergamo University Press, 2001); Cf. other sections, most notably 4.3.

⁹⁰ Cf. Caterina Nella Cotrupi, ‘Hypermetafiction: Italo Calvino’s *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveller*’, *Style*, 25.2 (1991), 280-90.

⁹¹ Cf. Daniele Del Giudice in: VV.AA., *Italo Calvino: atti del convegno internazionale, Firenze, Palazzo Medici-Riccardi, 26-28 febbraio, 1987* (Milan: Garzanti, 1988), p. 385; Geno Pampaloni, ‘Il lavoro dello scrittore’, in *Italo Calvino: atti del convegno internazionale*, pp. 17-30, p. 19.

⁹² Walter Pedullà, *L’estrema funzione: la letteratura degli anni settanta svela i propri segreti* (Florence: Le lettere, 2010), p. 225; Cf. Alberto Asor Rosa, *Stile Calvino* (Turin: Einaudi, 2001), p. 60.

⁹³ Gian Carlo Ferretti, *Le avventure del lettore: Calvino, Ludmilla e gli altri* (Lecce: Pier Manno, 1997), p. 80.

⁹⁴ Pampaloni, ‘Il lavoro dello scrittore’, cit., p. 17.

It is safe to say that such a paradoxical combination of metamorphosis and constancy has become something of an unresolved and unproblematic convention in criticism. The wordings differ, but the judgement more often than not is essentially the same: Calvino's work is considered 'sostanzialmente immutata pur attraverso il mutare', he shows a 'sperimentalismo rigoroso' and, simultaneously, a 'coerenza profonda', does not ever offer 'lo stesso punto di vista' in his novels, but still maintains a 'somiglianza profonda' from the first to the last work, and, lastly, he manages to combine a 'diversity and coherence', a 'polyhedric disposition' and a 'very personal signature'.⁹⁵ The term 'signature' is significant in the context of the 'firma' that Calvino himself mentions, as well as with regard to Jaffe's coinage of 'imprimatur'. It is certainly no coincidence that other critics, such as Franco Ricci, repeat this notion of a 'variegated, evolving, but unmistakable signature'.⁹⁶

This multifaceted critical constant has significant implications, since the underlying unity of Calvino's works turns him into a god-like figure, in the sense that he is one and multiple at the same time, 'uno e trino', something that often comes to the fore in analyses, but is mostly merely mentioned and repeated, not problematized or explained.⁹⁷ In the final instance, this can lead to a teleological reading of Calvino's works. In Luigi Montella's book on Calvino, the chapter titles are, amongst others, 'multidirezionalità', 'metamorfosi', 'complessità prismatica', but nevertheless he argues that Calvino's books developed not only coherently, but in a linear way, through a natural evolution.⁹⁸ Another statement, of Vittorio Curtoni, makes clear that a teleological reading of Calvino's works apparently does not at all exclude a simultaneous emphasis on the metamorphical character of his narrative trajectory: 'È difficile distinguere, in seno alla vasta produzione di Calvino, tra un

⁹⁵ Francesca Bernardini Napoletano, *I segni nuovi di Italo Calvino: da «Le cosmicomiche» a «Le città invisibili»* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1977), p. 201; Italo Calvino, *Romanzi e racconti: vol. 2*, Mario Barenghi and Bruno Falsetto (eds.) (Milan: Mondadori, 1992), pp. xxiv-xxv; Walter Pedullà (ed.), *Italo Calvino negli anni Sessanta*, cit., pp. 17, 20; Dani Cavallaro, *The Mind of Italo Calvino: a Critical Exploration of his Thought and Writings* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2010), pp. 4-5; Cf. also Martin McLaughlin, *Italo Calvino* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), pp. 162, 168; Capozzi, 'Cosmicomiche vecchie e nuove', cit., p. 67; Simonetta Chessa Wright, *La poetica neobarocca in Calvino* (Ravenna: Longo, 1998), p. 140.

⁹⁶ Ricci, *Approaches to Teaching the Works*, cit., p. 17.

⁹⁷ Cf. for example Barenghi, *Italo Calvino*, pp. 11-12, 29, 39; Claudio Milanini, *L'utopia discontinua: saggio su Italo Calvino* (Milan: Garzanti, 1990), p. 7.

⁹⁸ Luigi Montella, *Italo Calvino: il percorso dei linguaggi* (Salerno: Edisud-Salerno, 1996), pp. 13-14. Cf. Eugenia Paulicelli, 'Dalla città invisibile alla città futura: Italo Calvino: storia, impegno, linguaggio', *The Italianist*, 16 (1996), 143-60, pp. 144-45.

momento e l'altro, nel senso che ogni libro sembra già implicare le premesse del successivo, il quale però fornisce sempre nuove sorprese, nuovi fremiti.⁹⁹

Calvino has certainly favoured this paradox: his letters to critics time and again reveal the oscillation between unity and fragmentation.¹⁰⁰ In his comment on *Se una notte*, which is included in the book as well as in the posthumous *Romanzi e racconti*, he declared having strived to achieve a 'molteplicità che converge su (o s'irradia da) un'unità tematica di fondo.'¹⁰¹ One cannot escape the impression, though, that Calvino's self-comments have played a significant part in the image of an exceptionally coherent writer. In fact, when Pierpaolo Antonello writes that Calvino displays a 'coerenza che non ha pari nel nostro Novecento' he does not mean merely the 'programma di ricerca letteraria' but also the supporting 'costante e aggiornata riflessione di carattere epistemologico e teorico'.¹⁰² Provided that the author is the condition for coherence in a textual corpus, incoherence or 'going against the grain' can produce unease in critics. This unease seems visible in a passage from a volume of Claudia Nocentini, who at a certain point in the book proposes a reading that 'mi sembra quasi opporsi alla volontà dell'autore'. She immediately adds, however: 'Mi auguro che l'avere risposto alle domande implicite nel testo con altri brani tratti della sua opera faccia risaltare la sostanziale integrità dello scrittore'.¹⁰³ The coherence of the author is the premise, that which needs to be proven, and answers from other texts (necessarily just fragments of his whole oeuvre) provide the necessary 'evidence' for this self-sameness. The critic in this case mirrors what Calvino himself is often doing in his own self-readings: trying to square the circle of his different moods, moments and guises. As Spinazzola affirms: 'a garantire la continuità dello sviluppo [è] (...) l'impronta di una figura d'autore discretissimo sì ma sommamente autorevole.'¹⁰⁴

⁹⁹ Vittorio Curtoni, *Le frontiere dell'ignoto: vent'anni di fantascienza italiana* (Milan: Nord, 1977), p. 201.

¹⁰⁰ Calvino, *Lettere*, cit., pp. xxxvii-xxxix.

¹⁰¹ Calvino, *Romanzi e racconti: Vol. 2*, cit., p. 1392.

¹⁰² Pierpaolo Antonello, *Il ménage a quattro: scienza, filosofia, tecnica nella letteratura italiana del Novecento* (Florence: Le Monnier, 2005), p. 210.

¹⁰³ Claudia Nocentini, 'La Sanremo invisibile di Calvino', *The Italianist*, 9 (1989), 79-88, p. 87; Cf. Chiara Nannicini Streitberger, *La revanche de la discontinuité: bouleversements du récit chez Bachmann, Calvino et Perec*, (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2009), p. 189.

¹⁰⁴ Spinazzola, 'L'io diviso', cit., p. 97.

An important detail in the unity that critics read in Calvino's works is that it often works anachronistically backwards in time, as we will see more clearly in section 1.3. When Marco Belpoliti writes about a letter of Calvino of 1968, he remarks: 'a parlare è già il signor Palomar'.¹⁰⁵ Not only does he significantly conflate Palomar and Calvino, but he also reads Palomar in works that are pre-Palomar. This occurs far more often than the opposite: hence, when Lucia Re insists that 'the later Calvino – as late as *Palomar* (...) still retains traits of his neorealist debut', she is going against the grain that is explicitly or implicitly favored by Calvino critics.¹⁰⁶ Such a teleological reading can lead to deformations in the authorial image of Calvino, which can eventually develop into a sort of collective critical caricaturization of the Cuba-born writer. This has been acknowledged by critics such as Gian Carlo Ferretti and Mario Barenghi, who have voiced the need for a less linear, more contradictory image of Calvino in literary criticism.¹⁰⁷

If unity-in-spite-of-metamorphosis is considered such a distinguishing element of Calvino's (textual) corpus, where does this idea stem from? An important part of the answer seems to lie in the highly polyvalent, vague term 'style'. When Alberto Asor Rosa calls his volume *Stile Calvino*, he peritextually affirms the importance of the easily recognizable calvinian 'style'.¹⁰⁸ Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo has interestingly analyzed Calvino's style, claiming that it is in fact unique. He supports this statement with a thorough and enlightening *linguistic* analysis, which makes him something of an exception in Calvino criticism.¹⁰⁹ Calvino's style seems to be of crucial importance in creating at least the illusion of unity in an otherwise (according to most critics) very versatile series of works. This becomes clear when we read between the lines of many critical statements, as can already be gathered from the early monograph of Contardo Calligaris of 1973: 'L'abbiamo visto scegliere forme diverse, talora opposte, e abbiamo tentato di scoprire (...) l'unità nascosta della sua opera (...) e si tratta di un'unità di intenti che si concretizza nella fondazione di stili, nell'invenzione di forme.'¹¹⁰ Whereas Calligaris uses the plural

¹⁰⁵ Marco Belpoliti, *Settanta* (Turin: Einaudi, 2001), pp. 85-86.

¹⁰⁶ Lucia Re, 'Neorealist Narrative: Experience and Experiment', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Italian Novel*, cit., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 104-24, p. 111.

¹⁰⁷ Gian Carlo Ferretti, *Le capre*, cit.; Barenghi, *Le linee e i margini*, cit., p. 11.

¹⁰⁸ Asor Rosa, *Stile Calvino*, cit.

¹⁰⁹ Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo, 'Aspetti della lingua di Calvino', in, *Tre narratori: Calvino, Primo Levi, Parise*, ed. by Gianfranco Folena (Padua: Liviana, 1989), pp. 9-55.

¹¹⁰ Contardo Calligaris, *Italo Calvino* (Milan: U. Mursia, 1973), p. 109.

‘stili’ and ‘forme’, Pescio Bottino, another early critic, was even more clear: not only does she claim that a ‘puntuale ritratto’ of Calvino can be found in his style, she also sets forth that: ‘il suo rigore stilistico (...) assolve questo compito chiarificatore ed è il mezzo per rendere una la molteplicità dei suoi rapporti col mondo.’¹¹¹ A later example can be found in the following excerpt from Arturo Mazzaella’s judgement about Palomar, who he claims symbolizes the whole of Calvino’s fiction: ‘Dietro l’apparente dispersività delle varie escursioni, fisiche e mentali, compiute dal signor Palomar (...) la struttura del romanzo (...) rivela la calibrata compattezza tipica della scrittura di Calvino.’¹¹² Interestingly, structure and length (compact) here combine to suggest a ‘typical’ quality of Calvino’s writing. More generally, in all these quotes style is what turns an otherwise fragmentary set of texts into a coherent corpus.

Again it is almost impossible *not* to cite Calvino himself on this particular topic – a matter that is, in itself, very significant in the critical negotiation of Calvino’s authorial image, as we will see in later sections. In *I livelli della realtà in letteratura*, a presentation that Calvino held at an academic conference about the theme ‘I livelli della realtà’, he writes:

La condizione preliminare di qualsiasi opera letteraria è questa: la persona che scrive deve inventare quel primo personaggio che è l’autore dell’opera (...) È sempre solo una proiezione di se stesso che l’autore mette in gioco nella scrittura, e può essere la proiezione d’una vera parte di se stesso come la proiezione d’un io fittizio, d’una maschera. Scrivere presuppone ogni volta la scelta (...) di uno stile. L’autore è autore in quanto entra in una parte, come un attore, e s’identifica con questa proiezione di se stesso nel momento in cui scrive.¹¹³

This statement is not so much important in the way that it is often (implicitly) considered to be important: as an insight that Calvino offers in authorial intention. It is not relevant to establish if the above is ‘true’ (even if the argument here is in line with what Calvino is saying). What is more relevant at this point is the posture that Calvino adopts when he is uttering these phrases in front of an *academic* audience. He is of course saying that the author does not correspond to the biographical person that is behind the ‘signature’, that the author is, in that sense, a ‘mask’, a ‘persona’ in the etymological sense of the word. He is certainly not, however, abandoning claims of coherence and ‘style’. On the contrary: style is what defines an author. After this

¹¹¹ Germana Pescio Bottino, *Calvino* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1967), pp. 2, 39.

¹¹² Arturo Mazzaella, *La grande rete della scrittura: la letteratura dopo la rivoluzione digitale* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2008), p. 55.

¹¹³ Calvino, *Saggi*, cit., p. 389.

presentation, Calvino responded reluctantly and vaguely to questions of academics in the audience, not wishing to add to what he had said before, distancing his personal self from the words that had left his mouth moments before.¹¹⁴ His style, he seems to imply in so doing, is *written*, he himself is a *writer*, not an orator. He stressed this fact time and again in interviews, in which he adopted a stuttering persona, reluctant to utter ‘imperfect’ words, preferring the relative perfection of paper, or even silence.¹¹⁵

The shadow-discussion which is structurally avoided thus revolves around ‘style’. In his *Le demon de la théorie*, literary critic Antoine Compagnon dedicates a chapter to the problematic concept of style, a term which has a long history and that contains opposite poles of various spectra. Style denotes both objectivity and subjectivity, it can be a signifier of individuality as much as it can pertain to a school of writing or a specific period. This is true, according to Compagnon, because style – since Romanticism – can be used to describe both genius and genre.¹¹⁶ It is not difficult to see how the malleable term ‘style’ serves critics to define a writer, both in his or her peculiarities and in what ties the writer to other writers, current and past. Style is a word in which a ‘supersedure of meaning by function’ seems to have taken place: as an oft-used, almost intuitive term, it serves a function if not necessarily a meaning, it is a bridge between critical passages, a ‘nec plus ultra’ of explanation.¹¹⁷ As Martin McLaughlin points out: ‘Amidst the welter of studies on Calvino, few are devoted to the writer’s style. Most critics restrict themselves to an assessment which recycles adjectives that formed an integral part of his poetics, such as ‘preciso’, ‘leggero’, ‘limpido’, ‘lineare’.’¹¹⁸ In Calvino’s case, critics often seem to set him apart from other writers when referring to his style, but style is also a marker for ‘elective affinities’ with other writers, schools or genres (or, vice versa, to deny such affinities). Herein lies an important parallel with the critical attitude towards George Orwell, whose canonization has been partly due to the alleged perfection of his

¹¹⁴ Cf. Massimo Piattelli Palmarini, *Livelli di realtà* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1984).

¹¹⁵ Cf. Calvino, *Sono nato*, cit., p. ix; William Weaver, ‘Calvino: An Interview and its Story’, in *Calvino Revisited*, cit., pp. 17-31, p. 20.

¹¹⁶ Compagnon, *Op. cit.*, pp. 181-86.

¹¹⁷ Cf. Anton Zijderveld, *On Clichés: The Supersedure of Meaning by Function in Modernity* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979).

¹¹⁸ McLaughlin, *Italo Calvino*, cit., p. 145.

language.¹¹⁹ Like Orwell, Calvino is praised by most critics for his crystalline clarity, his deceptively simple, readily readable style.¹²⁰ For his style and use of language, Cesare Segre has even called Calvino the perfect writer.¹²¹ In this sense, Calvino comes close to being a ‘classicus’, which Ernst Robert Curtius describes in reference to the Middle Ages, and which denoted a model author in purely grammatical, compositional terms.¹²²

Apart from style, there is another plausible reason for the curious combination of diametrically opposed characteristics that Calvino embodies as an author. Calvino has been not only an extremely active, but also a ‘retroactive’ commentator of his own works, a ‘gambero che avanza camminando all’indietro’.¹²³ From the beginning of his career as a writer, Calvino betrayed a tendency to act as a rigorous censor and reviser of his own works, which he sometimes changed significantly even from edition to edition.¹²⁴ These revisions do not only concern the content of his works, but also the way he reads them, explains their genesis, their meaning and their value. The preface is one of the most important revisionist tools that Calvino repeatedly and successfully used. Before examining the most famous – and by far the most influential – preface that Calvino wrote to his own books (the preface of 1964 to *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno*), a preface of, arguably, Calvino’s most important editorial master needs to be briefly brought to attention.

In 1948, more than 10 years after the initial arduous and fragmentary publication process of his first novel *Il garofano rosso*, Elio Vittorini wrote an interesting preface to his debut. The task of writing this preface is reluctantly accepted by Vittorini (at least, this is what he claims), but the need for the preface takes the upper hand over his general disbelief in the utility of prefaces. The preface is, so Vittorini writes in a meta-statement that is contained within the preface itself,

¹¹⁹ John Rodden, *Scenes from an Afterlife: the Legacy of George Orwell* (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2003), p. 253.

¹²⁰ Enrico Testa, *Lo stile semplice: discorso e romanzo* (Turin: Einaudi, 1997).

¹²¹ Cesare Segre, ‘Letteratura’, in *La cultura italiana nel novecento*, ed. by Corrado Stajano et al. (Rome: Laterza, 1996), pp. 371-422, 400; Cf. Ann Hallamore Caesar and Michael Caesar, *Modern Italian Literature* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), p. 208.

¹²² Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), pp. 249-50; Cf. also section 4.1 of this thesis.

¹²³ Belpoliti, *Settanta*, cit., p. 88.

¹²⁴ Cf. Paola Castellucci, *Un modo di stare al mondo: Italo Calvino e l’America* (Bari: Adriatica, 1999), p. 55; Amelia Nigro, *Dalla parte dell’effimero: ovvero Calvino e il paratesto* (Pisa: Fabrizio Serra Editore, 2007), pp. 110-16.

more important than the work it comments upon.¹²⁵ Later on in the same essay, Vittorini elaborates on this contention:

Non mi appartiene eppure appartiene. A chi appartiene? Alla società alla quale io appartengo; alla generazione alla quale io appartengo (...) un libro è come se fosse stato scritto impersonalmente, da tutti coloro che hanno avuto o conosciuto o comunque sfiorato la mia stessa esperienza, vale a dire è un documento.¹²⁶

Vittorini here changes the meaning of his debut from an individual expression to an interesting, ‘impersonal’ rendition of a cultural climate. Calvino, in his 1964 preface, similarly distances himself from his first novel, in a foreword that is overtly reluctant and dubitative. Moreover, he too stresses its value as a document, the interest of which lies not in its artistic value, but in the ‘objective’ depiction of the spirit of a certain period, of the experiences of a generation. Calvino clearly learnt an important lesson from Vittorini, whose doubtful but nonetheless authoritative preface seems to have established a model that Calvino emulated some years later.

Vittorini was also an acknowledged editorial master, even though he and Calvino often disagreed.¹²⁷ His editorial ‘style’ however, the way he expressed and divulged his authoritative judgements, was certainly copied by Calvino in important respects. Vittorini’s concise, but precise and assertive readings of manuscripts, his assessments of aspiring writers’ flaws and achievements, were valued and absorbed by the young Calvino who collaborated with the Sicilian writer at Einaudi. Very soon, Calvino demonstrated a remarkable ‘sprezzatura’ in adopting an equally efficient and authoritative editorial voice, with which he intervened to accept or decline writers, to categorize and summarize, to review and revise. Even avowed, respected models of the first years of his writing career, such as Cesare Pavese, did not escape his sometimes surprisingly sharp pen. When Pavese’s influence as a model-writer on Calvino starts to wane, Calvino takes his distance through a strikingly similar procedure to that described above in Vittorini’s and Calvino’s prefaces. In his introduction to the anthology of Pavese’s essays that he himself assembled, Calvino points out that: ‘l’esperienza di Pavese è stata esemplare e cruciale di tutta una generazione letteraria, quella cresciuta sotto il fascismo, quella

¹²⁵ Elio Vittorini, *Le opere narrative: vol. 1*, ed. by Maria Corti (Milan: Mondadori, 1974), pp. 423-24.

¹²⁶ Vittorini, *Le opere narrative*, cit., p. 445.

¹²⁷ Cf. Luisa Mangoni, *Pensare i libri: la casa editrice Einaudi dagli anni trenta agli anni sessanta* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1999), pp. 680-81.

che avvertì nuovi bisogni e fece una svolta.’¹²⁸ Later, but similarly, Vittorini is portrayed by Calvino as a man who emblemizes a specific period, whose ‘style’ and intellectual presence, moreover, seem to coincide, as two sides of the same coin.¹²⁹ Interesting in this respect is Calvino’s ambiguous stance towards the *Menabò*, which he *afterwards* claimed to be wholly Vittorini’s journal, his own presence delimited to one ‘per onor di firma’. Nonetheless, many letters are the evidence of Calvino’s involvement in the journal and after Vittorini’s death in the first instance he offered to continue the journal, then quite suddenly abandoning this project without further explanation.¹³⁰

In interviews, Calvino tends to place himself *in between* the two opposite poles of Pavese and Vittorini, without subscribing to either authorial presence or programme: ‘I due nomi insieme significano soltanto un clima intellettuale’.¹³¹ However, their authority is not simply disregarded and discarded by Calvino, but reformulated and used when considered valuable. In the 1964 preface (as well as in its important – if often forgotten – prequel to that preface, the ‘nota’ of the 1954 edition) Calvino adopts Pavese’s (influential and favourable) views on his debut novel, integrating them in his own narrative.¹³² In this way, Pavese, Vittorini and *Il sentiero* are kept alive and distant at the same time, by turning them into exemplary instances of generational experiences.

The 1964 preface is again pivotal in this renegotiation (or anxiety) of influence. As in other instances, the actual content of the 1964 preface is not central to the argument here. More important are the critical repercussions of Calvino’s ‘prefazione schermo, una prefazione-trompe-l’oeil’ that has claimed a central role as one of his most cited texts.¹³³ The critical reading of this preface has coagulated from very early on into a recognizable pattern that is precisely in line with the intentions that Calvino seems to have had with the preface: to distance himself from the

¹²⁸ Cit. in: Castellucci, *Un modo di stare al mondo*, cit., p. 64; Cf. Calvino, *Sono nato*, cit., p. 67.

¹²⁹ Italo Calvino, ‘The Role of Vittorini’, *Twentieth Century Studies*, 5 (1971), 25-30, pp. 25-26.

¹³⁰ Cf. Cesare De Michelis, ‘Calvino e Vittorini la strana amicizia’, *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 7 August 2016, 20; Silvia Cavalli (ed.), *“Il Menabò” di Elio Vittorini (1959-1967)* (Turin: Einaudi, 2016).

¹³¹ Calvino, *Sono nato*, cit., pp. 135-36, but also pp. 125, 182, 285.

¹³² Cf. Federica Pedriali, ““Più per paura che per gioco?”: Three Textual Explorations of Calvino’s “Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno””, *The Modern Language Review*, 93.1 (1998), 59-70, pp. 61, 69; Giuliano Manacorda, ‘Nota su Italo Calvino’, *Belfagor*, 12 (1957), 197-200, p. 197.

¹³³ Domenico Scarpa, ‘Il fotografo, il cavaliere e il disegnatore: Italo Calvino nel 1964’, *Belfagor*, XLVIII (1993), 519-32, p. 524.

individual who wrote the book, to liberate the book from his ‘authorial intention’ in order to ascribe it to a climate. In this way, the book and especially the ‘correcting’ preface become an objective rendition of a historical period. Objective description effectively replaces self-commentary. This development starts already with the widely respected philologist Gianfranco Contini, who chooses to include precisely this preface of Calvino in his anthology of literature since the *Risorgimento*, to ‘represent’ Calvino and (implicitly, considering the character of the anthology and the nature of anthologies in general) the time in which he writes. Contini writes about a text ‘che costituisce un documento assai intelligente su quel periodo; dal cui inizio perciò, piuttosto che da qualcuno degli assai divulgati racconti, si è creduto di dover rappresentare l’autore.’¹³⁴ Calvino himself clearly recognized the potential of his preface when he wrote to Contini: ‘certo mi piacerebbe che Lei di quel mio scritto ne scrivesse’.¹³⁵ Martin McLaughlin shows himself in accordance with Contini, when he writes in the preface to the English translation of the novel: ‘he composed a preface which remains his most substantial and revealing self-commentary, as well as an indispensable objective analysis of Italian neo-realism.’¹³⁶ As a self-commentary, however, the text is highly and overtly problematic, as it is characterized by constant reformulations, new beginnings, affirmations that are subsequently denied, questioned or problematized.¹³⁷ Objective or not, with his preface Calvino has certainly managed to ‘rewrite the history of neorealism’ to become ‘rappresentativo di un clima di cultura diffuso’.¹³⁸ Calvino himself solidifies this idea in an interview when he says: ‘la Resistenza non l’ho inventata io, mi ci sono trovato in mezzo e ho preso la forma che la storia mi dava’.¹³⁹ Even if this preface has turned out to be particularly suggestive, it is not an isolated instance: Calvino tends to leave no commentary without ‘further comments’. By adding layers of comment to the initial comment, he often creates semantically dense ‘knots’ of various essays and prefaces written in a restricted time-span, in which he addresses

¹³⁴ Gianfranco Contini, *Letteratura dell’Italia unita 1861-1968* (Milan: Sansoni, 1994), pp. 1009-11.

¹³⁵ Roberto Cicala and Valenia La Mendola (eds.), *Libri e scrittori di Via Biancamano: casi editoriali in 75 anni di Einaudi: con illustrazioni e documenti* (Milan: EduCATT, 2009), p. 75.

¹³⁶ Italo Calvino, *The Path to the Spiders’ Nests* (London: Penguin, 2009), p. 1.

¹³⁷ Nigro, *Dalla parte dell’effimero*, cit., pp. 37-40.

¹³⁸ Ann Hallamore Caesar, ‘Italian Narrative: an Alternative Account’, in: *Italian Cultural Studies*, cit., pp. 248-60, p. 253; Milanini, *L’utopia discontinua*, cit., p. 26. Cf. also Alberto Asor Rosa, *Scrittori e popolo: il populismo nella letteratura italiana contemporanea* (Turin: Einaudi, 1988), pp. 160-62; Elizabeth Wren-Owens, *Postmodern Ethics* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2007), pp. 7, 11.

¹³⁹ Calvino, *Sono nato*, cit., p. 293.

the same or similar themes. Self-comments and comments on the work of others easily overlap and resonate, quite possibly working on the critics' unconscious. In this specific case, Calvino's 'notizia su Giorgio Manganelli' of 1965 continues many strands of the 1964 preface, in the sense that Calvino 'ridisegna il paesaggio della letteratura italiana presente e passata e colloca anche se stesso nel panorama d'insieme'.¹⁴⁰

A very concrete effect of the 1964 preface on the critical response towards Calvino seems to be the way in which the writing of the preface, the distancing of Calvino with respect to his earlier work, coincides with a 'watershed' that many critics see in 1964 in Calvino's work, resulting in an image of a 'scrittore dimezzato'.¹⁴¹ This reading is confirmed by many critics, resulting in a Janus-like writer of two phases/faces.¹⁴² Even though in the Meridiani volume of the *Romanzi e racconti* the contrasting of a 'first' and a 'second' Calvino is called 'ormai vieta', nonetheless the structure of the tomes tacitly reaffirms this contrast by establishing 1963 as the starting point of the second tome.¹⁴³ At a later stage in his career, Calvino has repeatedly denied the existence of any 'frattura' between his works.¹⁴⁴ However, there are indications that he was to some extent consciously working on the 'watershed': in a letter to Ferretti of October 1965 he writes about the uselessness (in his view) of 'biografia', whilst stressing the importance of what he calls 'curriculum', which he conceives as a thread, a logic between his books. He writes that the *Cosmicomiche*, his first 'post-1963' work, will be very important with regard to this 'curriculum', even though – he adds – the ideology is seemingly very difficult to find in this volume.¹⁴⁵

Interesting parallels can be traced between Calvino's prefatorial and authorial presence and the prefatorial posture of Henry James. Henry James has been a stable

¹⁴⁰ Belpoliti, *Settanta*, cit., p. 118; For other intertextual resonances of the 1964 preface within Calvino's corpus, cf. Jill Margo Carlton, 'The Genesis of Il barone rampante', *Italica*, 61.3 (1984), 195-206, p. 201.

¹⁴¹ McLaughlin, *Italo Calvino*, cit., p. 263, also p. 63.

¹⁴² Cf. Guido Bonsaver, *Il mondo scritto: forme e ideologia nella narrativa di Italo Calvino* (Turin: Tirrenia Stampatori, 1995), p. 3; Belpoliti, *Settanta*, cit., p. 117; Romano Luperini, *Dalla centralità del testo alla centralità del lettore: Boccaccio, Manzoni, Tozzi, Calvino: Atti del seminario di studi diretto da Romano Luperini* (Palermo: G.B. Palumbo, 1996), p. 174.

¹⁴³ Italo Calvino, *Romanzi e racconti*, cit., p. xli.

¹⁴⁴ Calvino, *Sono nato*, cit., pp. 114, 123.

¹⁴⁵ Calvino, *Lettere*, pp. 884-885; In an interesting but perhaps telling coincidence, Teresa De Lauretis picks 1965 as the 'debut year' of structuralism in Italy: Cf. Teresa De Lauretis, 'The Shape of the World: Report on Structuralism and Semiotics in Italy', *Books Abroad*, 49.2 (1975), 227-32.

factor within the framework of Calvino's constant interest in American literature.¹⁴⁶ Especially through his famous *New York Edition* James manages to introduce, in his many prefaces, an 'apparent separation of authorial identity into past and present selves' which 'enables James to create a Self that is both historicized and abundantly mature'.¹⁴⁷ Accordingly, he depicts himself as 'both creator and ideal consumer'.¹⁴⁸ Calvino achieves something remarkably similar in his own prefaces, in which, too, the more mature 'self' (the narrator) manages to overshadow the younger self (the subject). In this way, as James Olney notes, 'in duplex form, the present creates itself as it recreates the past (...) the story of the past becomes the story of writing about the past'.¹⁴⁹ The author of a preface talks with a distinctive voice, adopts another authority with respect to the author of the book, a difference upon which Calvino capitalizes, sometimes even by adopting a prefatorial persona. Occasionally this differentiation comes to the fore in a striking manner, as in the case of the following critical comment on a Calvinian preface: 'Non a caso il prefatore dell'edizione scolastica di questo romanzo sente il bisogno di dedicare un capitolo a "il paesaggio ligure" nell'opera di Calvino'.¹⁵⁰ This particular preface is written by a certain 'Tonio Cavilla', of whom, at the time, not every critic had understood the anagrammic derivation.

Without referring to Henry James, Carlo Serafini confirms this reading of the critical influence of Calvino's preface of 1964 (and, more generally, of Calvino's prefatorial practice):

In effetti Calvino è stato sempre fuori delle fasi che ha vissuto come scrittore, da neorealista era già nella fase favolistico-fiabesca, nella quale era già in quella sperimentale strutturale successiva (...) A Calvino interessa far capire che lui è altro da quello che ha scritto quel libro e quest'altro è il Calvino che scrive la prefazione, che la scrive in quel modo (...) La Prefazione diventa così una sorta di filtro tra scrittore e epoca, tra scrittore e opera prima, tra opera prima e resto della produzione narrativa, tra memoria e vita, tra memoria e letteratura, tra rappresentazione e realtà. In questo modo nella edizione del 1964 e nella successiva storia del libro, la prefazione ha più forza del romanzo stesso, è infatti uno dei testi più citati e commentati di Calvino.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁶ Castellucci, *Op. cit.*, p. 199.

¹⁴⁷ James Pearson, 'The Art of Self-Creation: Henry James in the New York Edition Prefaces', in *Marketing the Author: Authorial Personae, Narrative Selves and Self-Fashioning, 1880-1930*, ed. By Marysa Demoor (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 40-53, p. 46.

¹⁴⁸ James Pearson, *The Prefaces of Henry James*, cit., p. 2.

¹⁴⁹ Cit. in: Pearson, 'The Art of Self-Creation', cit., p. 50.

¹⁵⁰ Pietro Ferrua, 'Il sostrato sanremese nella narrativa di Italo Calvino', *Italica*, 54.3 (1977), 367-80, p. 370.

¹⁵¹ Carlo Serafini, 'La prefazione del 1964 a "Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno"', in *Italo Calvino negli anni Sessanta*, cit., pp. 201-16, p. 215.

This reading of Serafini will need to be verified, but it offers an interesting hypothesis: that Calvino manages to avoid having his name permanently connected to any literary movement. This characterizes a ‘unique’ author, who comes close to being a self-sufficient ‘genius’, a writer who does not follow different literary currents and fashions. Read in this light, the assertion of JoAnn Cannon that ‘neorealism (...) “influenced” but did not determine their [Calvino and Sciascia’s] work’, reveals a habitual way of conceiving the connection between Calvino and neorealism (and between the Ligurian writer and different literary ‘fashions’ in general).¹⁵² Calvino seems to have managed not to let neorealism write his authorial ‘resumé’, but to turn the tables around and help (re)write the story of neorealism. The context in which critics and readers interpret his first novel is thus partly decided by the writer himself, with the ‘knowledge’ that distance and time (and arguably a stronger reputation as public intellectual) supposedly have bestowed on him.

The importance of taking into account the way in which Calvino contributed to the (re)writing of literary and cultural history, in self-comments that have often been read as ‘objective’ socio-cultural or historical reappraisals, is even more clear when one considers not only the sheer amount, but also the visibility of Calvino’s prefaces. This will become more evident in later sections, when Calvino’s editorial activities will be analyzed more in detail. However, it is important to note here that Calvino’s preface of 1964 was not at all a unique occasion: the amount of prefaces that Calvino wrote to his own books as well as to those of others is impressive and unequalled by almost any other writer. The preface to his first collection of essays, *Una pietra sopra*, is an interesting example of another instance in which Calvino effectively rewrites his own – in this case essayistic – past, and simultaneously distances himself from the ‘young’ Calvino.¹⁵³ Nominally, on this occasion in 1980 Calvino places the first ‘pietra sopra’ a collection of his essays, but there are earlier essays which can already be considered ‘pietre sopra’ in their own regard. Calvino’s essayistic career reads very much as a sequence of lids that he puts on earlier work.

¹⁵² JoAnn Cannon, *Postmodern Italian Fiction: the Crisis of Reason in Calvino, Eco, Sciascia, Malerba* (Rutherford: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 1989), p. 27.

¹⁵³ Cf. Paolo Chirumbolo, *Tra coscienza e autocoscienza: saggi sulla narrativa degli anni Sessanta: Volponi, Calvino, Sanguineti* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2009), p. 10; Maria Corti, ‘Testi o macrotesto? I racconti di Marcovaldo di Italo Calvino’, *Strumenti Critici*, IX (1975), 182-97, p. 185.

Through these lids, he merely seems to ‘close’ a chapter, but, in fact, every time he presents a new reading of earlier essays.¹⁵⁴

Calvino revisits his essayistic past not only through the content of newer essays, but also via the overall structure of his volumes and the selection of the essays that he singles out for publication. The aforementioned *Una pietra sopra* mostly includes Calvino’s later essays, excluding a whole corpus of earlier, more ‘politically coloured’ essays and writings. This too is a procedure which he ‘practiced’ first in his editorial work on other writers, for example in his choice of the essays of Pavese, or in the anthologies that he presided over as main editor. Order and selection carry a significant ‘calvinian stamp’, which is not (and could never be) objective. Calvino’s *a posteriori* revisions and restructurations of single texts into a new ‘macrotesto’ are not only restricted to his essays: almost all of his volumes, from the *Racconti* to the various *Cosmicomiche*, from *I nostri antenati* to *Palomar* are the product of such rearrangements and reappraisals.¹⁵⁵ This process of selection determines, amongst other things, the availability and visibility of essays and fiction: Calvino chooses to make certain things available to critics, whilst others remain shaded. The first English editions of his essays are a good example of the effects of this practice: *The Literature Machine*, the first selection of Calvino’s essays to be published in English, is very much based on Calvino’s own *Una pietra sopra* and even further accentuates the de-politicization of the Italian volume. In general, certain essays that Calvino highlights through his selection, such as the much cited ‘trilogy’ *Il midollo del leone*, *Il mare dell’oggettività* and *La sfida al labirinto*, have received a comparatively large share of critical attention (both before and after their anthologization in *Una pietra sopra*).

A last remark should be made, before shifting the attention to another aspect of Calvino’s (self-)presentation. Critics have noticed the growing tendency of Calvino, in the course of his career, to write fiction that is ever more essayistic and metaliterary.¹⁵⁶ In part, this has already emerged from the discussion about *Se una notte*, but other books, most notably *La giornata d’uno scrutatore*, *Le città invisibili*, *Il castello dei destini incrociati*, and *Palomar* incorporate critical analyses, essayistic

¹⁵⁴ Cf. Castellucci, *Op. cit.*, p. 80; Angela Jeannet, ‘A Writer’s Project: Cornerstones, Milestones, and Headstones’, in *Calvino Revisited*, cit., pp. 207-25.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. amongst others Milanini, *Op. cit.*, pp. 68-69.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. already: Bernardini Napoletano, *I segni nuovi di Italo Calvino*, cit., p. 95.

passages and critical theory. There are many signs of the cross-fertilization of Calvino's fiction and non-fiction, for example in the repetition of metaphors that recur in both.¹⁵⁷ The clearest example of this cross-fertilization might be the last volume of fiction that the writer-critic published during his lifetime, *Palomar*. *Palomar* had appeared in the newspapers *Corriere della Sera* and *Repubblica* from the mid-seventies onwards, in pieces that were conscious mixtures of analysis, description and narration, presented in clear dialogue with the socio-cultural developments of those years. It is therefore hardly a surprise that the pieces have ended up divided between the different 'Meridiani' volumes: the ones that have been published as *Palomar* have been included in the *Romanzi e racconti*, but other pieces are to be found in the *Saggi*.

Calvino's active role as writer of prefaces and essays that not only interlace with his own fiction, but that also comment authoritatively on the works of other writers, is critically relevant. Considering the scope of Calvino's commentaries and their critical echo, Mario Barenghi's 'warning' about the danger to 'presentare per suo tramite mezzo secolo di storia della nostra cultura letteraria' seems hardly exaggerated (even if, as we will see, perhaps somewhat outdated by now).¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ Cf. JoAnn Cannon, 'Italo Calvino: the Last Two Decades', in *Calvino revisited*, cit., pp. 51-64, p. 54; Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo *Profili di critici del Novecento* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1998), p. 83.

¹⁵⁸ Barenghi, *Italo Calvino*, cit., p. 8.

1.3 Critical responses to Calvino's self-presentation: autobiography, values, testaments and objectivity in *Lezioni americane* and *Palomar*

The scope of Calvino's self-(re)presentation and his contributions to the interpretation of the books of other writers are equally impressive. The question in this section is: how do critics respond to Calvino's myriad self-comments? Do they manage to remain immune, which would arguably be the only valid reason *not* to address these 'extra', seemingly marginal writings of Calvino? The particular relationship between life and writing is an essential node in the critical knot around Calvino and therefore will be central here.

A long-standing critical cliché tells us that biography is not important for Calvino: what counts are the texts, the books, not the man who wrote them. In the Italian editions of Calvino's books that have been published by Mondadori, Calvino's biographical data are always framed by words of Calvino that deny the importance of such data. The same is true for some editions in English, such as *Into the war*.¹⁵⁹ This might be construed as a form of paratextual migration between editions in different languages, as well as an indication of implicit hierarchy from the 'original' (Italian) to the 'derivative' (English, in this case). This pattern is repeated in critical volumes, such as in Albert Howard Carter's study about Calvino. Carter explains that his approach to Calvino's works is not biographical, which (so he sets forth) is in line with the Sanremese writer's own contentions and intentions.¹⁶⁰ A paradox looms into view here: quotes of Calvino, often from letters or interviews, hence from the 'person', are used to underline a poetics of impersonality. In other words: a poetics of impersonality, of a text that is cut loose from the person who wrote it, is being *authorized* by quoting the writer/auctor himself.¹⁶¹

Calvino and critics seem to agree that the writer as 'autobiographical person' is of no importance for the study of his books. However, the search for 'Italo Calvino' is not abandoned by critics, who come up with surrogates and substitutes for this biographical presence. We have already encountered the example of 'style', but critics look for Calvino in other ways and places, in his books, his characters, as

¹⁵⁹ Italo Calvino, *Into the war* (London: Penguin, 2011).

¹⁶⁰ Carter, *Metamorphoses of fantasy*, cit., p. 12.

¹⁶¹ Cf. Gaston Franssen, *Gerrit Kouwenaar en de politiek van het lezen*, (Nijmegen: Vantilt, 2008), p. 71.

well as in environments, both mental and real. The line between ‘bio’ and ‘graphein’ is often just a small, conventional outward sign: biography becomes ‘bio-graphy’.¹⁶² Writing and life are distanced, but not disconnected. The somewhat curious but also ubiquitous term which is adopted most frequently by critics to express the set of autobiographical elements that are considered relevant is ‘autobiografia intellettuale’.¹⁶³ The meaning of this term is never explained by critics who adopt it, but it has a long history and seems to be meaningfully connected to Benedetto Croce’s proposition of the ‘autobiografia mentale’, which he considered to be of critical importance. With this term Croce expresses the distinction between the ‘empirical I’ and the ‘aesthetic I’ of an artist, which can be translated in simplistic terms as the person who breathes, eats and walks and the person that is ‘inside’ the work of art.¹⁶⁴ This resonates strongly with later concepts such as that of the ‘implied author’, which were conceived in order to ‘save’ the ‘dead author’.

Calvino did write about himself, albeit seldom directly. Already in 1948 the then Turin-based writer states that ‘il problema di come sistemare quell’ingombrantissimo personaggio che per uno scrittore moderno è l’“io”’ was one of the most difficult and pressing authorial nodes to disentangle.¹⁶⁵ Several critics have tried to capture this struggle from the start of his career and Calvino’s ‘autobiografismo antinarcisistico’ has become almost proverbial.¹⁶⁶ Critical consensus has it that Calvino, as a person, fades away at the moment he starts writing, as can be seen from the following quote in a recent essay of Giovanna Lombardo: ‘È forse questa la ragione per cui scrivere di sé risulta così difficile, tanto che per Calvino è sempre preferibile celarsi nei suoi libri ovvero esserci sempre nascosto da una scrittura d’ombra, che ha la propria radice proprio lì dove inizia lo sguardo di Calvino sul mondo.’¹⁶⁷ In other words: Calvino’s writing coincides with his ‘sguardo’. However, this seems to be true also for his *self*-writing: ‘Egli offre in tal modo uno dei frammenti del proprio autoritratto che sembra coincidere con una

¹⁶² Cf. the quote of Barthes on p. 18 of the thesis.

¹⁶³ Cf. for example Calvino, *Saggi*, cit., p. xiv.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. Gianfranco Contini, *La parte*, cit., p. 5; Mario Lavagetto, *Eutanasia della critica* (Turin: Einaudi, 2005), p. 45.

¹⁶⁵ Calvino, *Saggi*, cit., pp. 1483-84.

¹⁶⁶ Calvino, *Romanzi e racconti: Vol. 2*, cit., p. xvii.

¹⁶⁷ Giovanna Lombardo, ‘Strategie autobiografiche in Calvino: un’ipotesi di lettura’, in *Italo Calvino: percorsi potenziali*, ed. by Raffaele Aragona (Lecce: Manni, 2008), pp. 119-33, p. 126.

forma dello sguardo.¹⁶⁸ Lombardo combines two judgements here that are far from unique in Calvino criticism: that ‘Italo Calvino’ is an ‘author of paper’ in the Barthesian sense, and that his writing is the product of his gaze, not his body, his person.¹⁶⁹ If we were to visualize the critical consensus of Calvino, something like a book with eyes that look towards the world, which in turn is mainly constituted of other books, would be the result. The ‘I’ of Calvino is construed both as a ‘grande biblioteca’, and as ‘pelle senza corpo’.¹⁷⁰

This Borgesian bodylessness, the idea of Calvino as a walking library, is an important component of Calvino’s authorial image. Because of this, biography becomes predominantly the domain of mental coordinates, which can still correspond to real surroundings when reduced to their ‘essence’, a nexus that Calvino’s essay *Dall’opaco* famously ‘brings to light’. Critics who strive to infuse Calvino’s works at least with the laterally biographical element of ‘objective surroundings’ often have recourse to this essay, which has slowly but steadily grown from a minor essay to a major one in Calvino criticism. The opinion that the Ligurian landscape has somehow formed the mental outlook of the person (and the writer) Calvino is broadly held by critics.¹⁷¹ Calvino’s curious form of ‘autobiografismo saggistico’ seems to have directed critics to establish a somewhat superficial connection between Calvino’s mind, and more specifically his authorial ‘gaze’, and the environments in which he lived.¹⁷² Not only is this a thinly disguised biographical reading which effectively (if distortedly) reintroduces the author of the ‘impersonal’ text into critical discourse, the specific figure of the author that is presumed is highly significant for the way in which the texts are approached, for the reading that they ‘allow for’. Reading the person Calvino in his own books has not been authorized by the Ligurian writer, but reading San Remo, Rome, Paris, New York, Turin, Venice,

¹⁶⁸ Lombardo, ‘Strategie autobiografiche in Calvino’, cit., p. 126.

¹⁶⁹ Cf. Alessandro Iovinelli, *L'autore e il personaggio: l'opera metabiografica nella narrativa italiana degli ultimi trent'anni*, (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2004), p. 34. For this last point, cf. § 2.2 and 4.3.

¹⁷⁰ Massimo Schilirò, *Le memorie difficili: saggio su Italo Calvino*, (Catania: C.U.E.C.M., 2002), pp. 6, 28.

¹⁷¹ Cf. Maria Rizzarelli, *Sguardi dall’opaco: saggi su Calvino e la visibilità* (Acireale: Bonanno, 2008), pp. 9-22; Claudia Nocentini, *Italo Calvino and the landscape of childhood* (Leeds: Northern Universities Press, 2000); Giorgio Bertone, *Letteratura e paesaggio: liguri e no: Montale, Caproni, Calvino* (Lecce: Manni, 2001).

¹⁷² Milanini, *Op. cit.*, p. 73.

or even Mexico and Japan in them *has* been authorized, and in fact turns out to be very productive in Calvino criticism.

With respect to the discussion in the previous section, it should be pointed out that this strange ‘biographical’ sum or mixture of mental and environmental coordinates functions as a locus of coherence in criticism. The metamorphical writer who changes drastically from book to book, again turns out to be an authorial figure of considerable, if not specified, coherence. Marco Belpoliti, for example, writes when comparing the authorial figure of Giorgio Manganelli and Calvino: ‘La figura di Manganelli attraverso i suoi libri appare più complessa di quella di Calvino; egli [Calvino] ha operato, se così possiamo dire, una drastica semplificazione della propria personalità, una *reductio ad unum*, per via razionale.’¹⁷³ Belpoliti explicitly talks about a ‘figure’ that Calvino offers ‘through his books’ and which seems to him univocal. This implies that Calvino offers a strong image of himself in his works, an image which apparently is easily decipherable for critics. The question at this point is, however, if critics are passive in this process, or if they are, maybe, implicated in this ‘*reductio ad unum*’.

A reductive tendency in criticism that has gained a strong currency is to consider the ‘last’ Calvino to be a ‘*pars pro toto*’ for the whole Calvino, where we find, in condensed form, ‘tutta la sua esperienza e tutte le sue convinzioni’, a contention against which some critics, such as Massimo Bucchiantini, have vigorously protested.¹⁷⁴ In spite of the notes of protest, most instruments of the orchestra seem to repeat this chorus, which is so suggestive that even those who are trying to present a more nuanced reading of Calvino’s career, in some instances still unwillingly seem to fall prey to it. For example, when Alessia Ricciardi writes about a ‘particular misconception’, especially in the United States, where according to her ‘Calvino’s achievement has been identified almost exclusively with the fabulist narratives he produced over roughly the last two decades of his life’, she is doing so in a book in which she practically reduces Calvino to his *Lezioni americane*, which she, in fact, calls his ‘final testament’.¹⁷⁵ To call the *Lezioni americane* a ‘final testament’ has

¹⁷³ Belpoliti, *Settanta*, cit., p. 176.

¹⁷⁴ Calvino, *Romanzi e racconti: vol. 1*, cit., p. xii; Massimo Bucchiantini, *Italo Calvino e la scienza: gli alfabeti del mondo* (Rome: Donzelli, 2007), p. 53.

¹⁷⁵ Alessia Ricciardi, *After La Dolce Vita: a Cultural Prehistory of Berlusconi’s Italy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), pp. 81, 10.

become such a cliché of Calvino criticism, that the list of volumes and articles that refer to it with these words is virtually infinite.¹⁷⁶ Variants of this ‘final testament’ are also rife: ‘confessione’, ‘confessional’, ‘testamento spirituale’, ‘literary legacy’, ‘last will’ are some of the terms that critics have used.¹⁷⁷ Wladimir Kryinski, in explaining the use of the term ‘last will’ even proposes that Calvino *as a person* can be found in the *Lezioni*, something which can be inferred from all the abovementioned terms.

The weight that is accordingly bestowed on this posthumously published collection of lectures (which Calvino was supposed to deliver at Harvard in 1985) once more facilitates a teleological reading of Calvino’s oeuvre. In the preface to *Why Read the Classics* we read, for example, that the essays in that volume ‘demonstrate how Calvino consistently appreciated the five literary qualities that he regarded as essential for the next millennium.’¹⁷⁸ Dani Cavallaro even denies and affirms such a reading within one and the same sentence: ‘As a cumulative, holistic ensemble Calvino’s works can be regarded as an ongoing and by no means teleologically driven quest to implement the tenets discussed in *Six memos*.’¹⁷⁹ Calvino’s quest might not have been teleologically driven, but a reading of his works as an effort to ‘implement’ categories that he invented in 1985 *is*.¹⁸⁰ The same contradiction can be seen in a volume of Massimo Rizzante, who first attests that the *Lezioni* are ‘a torto definite da qualche parte il suo testamento letterario’, but a couple of pages later seems to adopt this view himself when he writes: ‘Ci sono alcune parole-chiave nell’arte della prosa di Calvino. Le conosciamo bene, perché è stato proprio Calvino uno dei migliori critici della sua opera. Le ritroviamo in

¹⁷⁶ Cf. Wladimir Kryinski, ‘Borges, Calvino, Eco: the Philosophies of Metafiction’, in *Literary Philosophers: Borges, Calvino, Eco*, ed. by Jorge J.E. Gracia., Carolyn Korsmeyer and Rodolphe Gasché (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 185-204, p. 197; Eugenio Bolongaro, ‘Italo Calvino and the Role of the Intellectual: Autobiography in Fiction’, in *Creative Interventions: The Role of Intellectuals in Contemporary Italy*, ed. by Eugenio Bolongaro, Rita Gagliano and Mark Epstein (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars), pp. 115-40, p. 124; Cf. also in the bibliography Piacentini, Pepe, Mazzarella and Re (1998).

¹⁷⁷ Montella, *Italo Calvino*, cit., pp. 13-14; Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert, ‘A Method for the New Millennium: Calvino and Irony’, in *Literary Philosophers*, cit., pp. 129-48, p. 133; Ruggero Puletti, *Un millenarismo improbabile: le «Lezioni americane» di Italo Calvino* (Rome: Lucarini, 1991), p. 20; Martin McLaughlin, ‘Words and Silence: Calvino Criticism 1985-1995’, *Romance Studies*, 14.2 (1996), 79-96; Angela Jeannet, *Under the Radiant Sun and Crescent Moon: Italo Calvino’s Storytelling* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), p. 33; Wladimir Kryinski, ‘Rereading the Memorable Memos or How to Read *Lezioni americane*’, *Rivista di Studi Italiani*, 21.2 (2003), 176-84, p. 183.

¹⁷⁸ Italo Calvino, *Why Read the Classics?* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1999), p. ix.

¹⁷⁹ Cavallaro, *The Mind of Italo Calvino*, cit., p. 9.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. O’Rawe, *Authorial Echoes*, cit., p. 153.

sequenza nelle *Lezioni americane*.¹⁸¹ In this case, the direct influence of Calvino on the critical reading of his oeuvre is overtly stated, and the teleological or anachronistic nature of this reading, through the lens of posthumous categories, is crystal clear. The categorization seems deceptively simple: Calvino himself says how we should read his works, in a neat sequence of ‘values’ which he wrote down just before his death. The ‘fatal’ attraction to the *Lezioni* is widespread and difficult to resist, even when explicitly denied.

Not every critic is convinced by this role of the *Lezioni* as universal key to Calvino’s (and often also other writers’) work. Even though they constitute a clear minority, some opinions have pointed to a relativization of this particular volume of the Sanremese writer.¹⁸² Maria Corti argues that they are ‘solo lezioni per studenti’ and claims that Calvino would have revised them many times and significantly before publishing these ‘lessons’ – if indeed he intended to publish them, which we cannot ascertain.¹⁸³ Marco Belpoliti too has pointed to the fact that Calvino had in mind to rewrite the text for a possible Italian edition.¹⁸⁴ Other critics similarly argue that the volume is actually an ‘opera mutila’, a ‘macrotesto sospeso’.¹⁸⁵ Even though we cannot be sure of how Calvino saw the *Lezioni*, both taking into account and disregarding his authorial intention it seems highly questionable to inflate the significance of the *Lezioni* to the status of a testament, the key to an oeuvre, something that critics have nonetheless done *en masse*. It is true that Calvino was occupied with these lectures at the time of his death, but this does not mean that he intended them to be his testament, as if he had foreseen his own death. Not only was he still working on many projects, reading an oeuvre that spans forty years by adopting abstract and multi-interpretable ‘categories’ or ‘values’ that Calvino invented in 1985 seems rather ahistorical and homologizing. However, as Lawrence Lipking has showed in the case of poets, ‘last works, like last words, have a special aura of authenticity’, which has, for example, caused critics to consider the last edition of Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* as containing the essence in which to find

¹⁸¹ Massimo Rizzante, *Il geografo e il viaggiatore: variazioni su Italo Calvino e Gianni Celati* (Fossombrone: Metauro, 1993, pp. 69, 76-77.

¹⁸² Cf. Cortellessa, *Libri segreti*, cit., pp. 318-21.

¹⁸³ Cit. in: Puletti, *Un millenarismo improbabile*, cit., p. 7.

¹⁸⁴ Belpoliti, *Settanta*, cit., p. 165; Cf. Mario Barengi, ‘Calvino un bilancio generazionale’, on <http://www.doppiozero.com/materiali/calvino-trentanni-dopo> (11 April 2016).

¹⁸⁵ Calvino, *Saggi*, cit., p. xli.

Whitman's final unity (something that Whitman encouraged with his own rhetoric of organic unity).¹⁸⁶

A similar critical weight has been given to the last book of fiction that Calvino published during his lifetime: *Palomar*.¹⁸⁷ This volume, which has its foundation in newspaper articles, of which some appeared already almost ten years before the publication of the book, has been called, immediately, a 'summa of Calvino's work', constituting the 'essence (...) pure and unadulterated' of Calvino's oeuvre.¹⁸⁸ In the first decade after publication there was a true boom of comments upon the work, which by far got the most critical attention in that period.¹⁸⁹ One of the curious aspects of these critical readings is that *Palomar* has become almost exclusively Calvino's fictional autobiography, and the protagonist his alter ego. In interviews Calvino has certainly not made a mystery of the autobiographical nature of *Palomar*, the stories of which take place in surroundings that are often easily recognizable as connected to Calvino's own. Moreover, according to Stephen Chubb, in the book Calvino consistently blurs the distinctions between the authorial self, the narrator and the character Palomar, which makes them overlap, so that 'Calvino is projected into Palomar.'¹⁹⁰ Nonetheless, the amount of critics that do not seem to distinguish between Palomar and Calvino is still surprisingly high, especially when one considers the overt skepticism about authorial intention and biographical readings that had been so frequently voiced by critics at the time of *Se una notte*, only a couple of years before. It very much seems as if Calvino's 'stage directions' were carefully heeded by critics who attended the 'experimental play' of the development of Calvino's authorial figure. In this respect, Markey's contention that *Se una notte* mirrors the 'author as writer' whereas *Palomar* reflects 'the author as man' is particularly revealing.¹⁹¹ *Palomar* and Calvino are construed as a binomial entity, *Palomar-Calvino*, which makes its appearance almost immediately in a very

¹⁸⁶ Lawrence Lipking, *Op. cit.*, pp. 67, 120-21.

¹⁸⁷ Cf. Jansen, *Il dibattito sul postmoderno*, cit., p. 280.

¹⁸⁸ JoAnn Cannon, 'Calvino's Latest Challenge to the Labyrinth: a Reading of *Palomar*', *Italica*, 62.3 (1985), 189-200, p. 190; Franco Ricci, 'Palomar by Italo Calvino: The (un)Covering of (un)Equivocal (un)Truth', *Quaderni d'Italianistica: Official Journal of the Canadian Society for Italian Studies*, 5.2 (1984), 236-44, p. 236.

¹⁸⁹ McLaughlin, 'Words and Silence', cit., p. 85.

¹⁹⁰ Stephen Chubb, *I, Writer, I, Reader: the Concept of Self in the Fiction of Italo Calvino* (Market Harborough: Troubadour, 1997), pp. 101-2; Cf. section 4.1, in which Eugenio Bolongaro's diametrically opposed reading is presented.

¹⁹¹ Constance Markey, *Italo Calvino: a Journey Toward Postmodernism* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1999), p. 120, also p. 25.

great number of critical analyses.¹⁹² The form ‘Palomar-Calvino’ or ‘Calvino-Palomar’ recurs very frequently in articles, but the seemingly simple line that binds the two is the result of many different levels of (silently) preceding critical conclusions and thus of a form of critical ellipse. The line exemplifies that the passage from Palomar to Calvino and vice versa is very easy in criticism, so much so even that Calvino has often been equalled to Palomar in a quite straightforward manner. Pierpaolo Antonello writes, for example, that Calvino’s essay *Mondo scritto e mondo non scritto* confirms the ‘trasformazione di Calvino in mister Palomar’.¹⁹³ Often one finds references to ‘Calvino alias signor Palomar’ and sometimes, still more significantly, the similitude even disappears, as in Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo’s reference to ‘Palomar stesso’ when he writes about Calvino.¹⁹⁴ This has even led to seeing the death of Palomar as a prefiguration of the death of Calvino.¹⁹⁵

Increasingly one can detect a tendency in Calvino criticism to reduce the autobiographical in his fiction essentially to Palomar alone. Texts such as *La speculazione edilizia* and *La nuvola di smog* (two of the most neglected works of Calvino) are rarely considered in this respect.¹⁹⁶ The argument that the volume of Palomar evolved out of what was originally a series of newspaper articles is rather problematic: not only is it doubtful that Calvino was more ‘truthful’, more ‘himself’ in newspapers, but following this criterion *Marcovaldo*, which appeared in *L’unità* before being published in a volume, would have to receive the same critical treatment.¹⁹⁷ Another possible argument, namely that Calvino himself pointed to the autobiographical character of Palomar, is also frequently used.¹⁹⁸ Firstly, it should be pointed out that this is not only the case with Palomar, but also with other Calvinian

¹⁹² To cite only a few, cf. Cannon, ‘Italo Calvino: the Last Two Decades’, cit., pp. 59-63; Olivia Santovetti, *Digression: a Narrative Strategy in the Italian Novel* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007); Pierpaolo Antonello, *Il ménage a quattro*, cit., p. 176.

¹⁹³ Antonello, *Il ménage a quattro*, cit., p. 167.

¹⁹⁴ Belpoliti, *Settanta*, cit., p. 20; Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo, ‘Aspetti della lingua di Calvino’, cit., p. 38.

¹⁹⁵ Gian Paolo Biasin, ‘The Surface of Things, the Depth of Words’, in *Calvino Revisited*, cit., pp. 157-70, p. 168; Gore Vidal, ‘On Italo Calvino’, *The New York Review of Books*, 21 November 1985; Marziano Guglielminetti, ‘La scrittura contro la morte (nota su ‘Palomar’), in *Italo Calvino: imaginaire et rationalité*, ed. by Aurore Frasson-Marin (Genève: Slatkine, 1991), pp. 77-89, p. 77; Cortellessa, *Libri segreti*, cit., p. 58.

¹⁹⁶ Calvino, *Romanzi e racconti: Vol. 1*, cit., pp. xv-xvi; Calvino himself in 1979 calls *La speculazione* ‘una specie di autobiografia intellettuale’. Cf. Calvino, *Sono nato*, cit., p. 292.

¹⁹⁷ Giorgio Bertone, *Italo Calvino: il castello della scrittura* (Turin: Einaudi, 1994), p. 17.

¹⁹⁸ Cf. Belpoliti, *Settanta*, cit., pp. 216-17.

characters such as Marcovaldo and Amerigo Ormea.¹⁹⁹ This ‘confession’ has, however, two sides, since the focus on this biographical aspect did not exclusively come from Calvino himself, as can be seen from the amount of attention that has been given to the argument in interviews since 1975. The titles often reveal that Calvino quickly turns into Palomar in the eyes of the interviewers: ‘Calvino un vecchio saggio: sto fuori e guardo il mondo’, ‘Un altrove da cui guardare l’universo’, ‘Un silenzioso che ha molto da dire’, ‘L’occhio e il silenzio’, ‘L’observatoire Calvino’.²⁰⁰ Many of Calvino’s ‘confessions’ in these interviews are partial, and are uttered in response to questions of the interviewers. Nonetheless, Calvino clearly contributed to marking the autobiographical side to Palomar, for example by letting himself be filmed ‘as Palomar’, in a situation clearly suggestive of Palomar.²⁰¹ Palomar is certainly more transparently and avowedly autobiographical than other, more opaque and indirect autobiographical elements in Calvino’s works, but therefore not necessarily a more ‘true’ or ‘complete’ portrait of the ‘whole’ Calvino.²⁰²

Claudio Milanini has written about a ‘spazio latamente autobiografico per l’insieme dei testi’ of Calvino, an autobiographical space which is, by implication, less well-defined, more open to different readings.²⁰³ In doing so, he probably consciously echoes Philippe Lejeune’s ‘espace autobiographique’. For Lejeune, autobiography consists for a good part in the invention of a form or style, it is an essentially negotiable ‘genre’, established as much by writers as by readers.²⁰⁴ As Elena Porciani points out, in the course of his academic career Lejeune developed towards insights that envisioned autobiography as something which needs to be historicized as a reading convention, instead of being presumed inherent in the autobiographical ‘material’.²⁰⁵ Not coincidentally, Roland Barthes is an important example in Lejeune’s book, because – in providing an image of himself in books like *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* – he was reader and critic in one. A clear parallel with Calvino can even be found in the image: ‘Barthes strived for the maximum elasticity, fearing to remain trapped in his ‘imaginaire’ [imagination/

¹⁹⁹ Cf. Calvino, *Sono nato*, cit., pp. 122, 158.

²⁰⁰ Ivi, pp. 551, 558, 622.

²⁰¹ Weiss, *Understanding Italo Calvino*, cit., p. 130.

²⁰² Cf. Milanini, *Op. cit.*, pp. 92-93; O’Rawe, *Authorial Echoes*, cit., pp. 149-50.

²⁰³ Ivi, p. 93.

²⁰⁴ Lejeune, *Je est un autre*, cit., pp. 170-71, 174.

²⁰⁵ Elena Porciani, ‘Patto e spazio autobiografico: l’avventura teorica di Philippe Lejeune’, *Intersezioni*, 2 (2007), 487-95.

‘imaginary field’] (...) the result is nevertheless that the game of flight from his ‘imaginaire’ in our eyes simply becomes the essential characteristic of his imaginaire.’²⁰⁶ One could venture the guess that, if *Se una notte* had been Calvino’s last book instead of *Palomar*, his authorial image would have remained much more ‘Barthesian’ in this sense.

The fact that autobiographical elements in earlier texts are seldom mentioned inevitably produces a temporal flattening, a simplification and ‘de-historization’ in Calvino’s authorial figure. Eugenio Bolongaro suggests this too, when he writes that Calvino distances himself from his ‘alter ego’ Palomar, just as he had done before with respect to Amerigo, the protagonist of *La giornata d’uno scrutatore* and Kim from *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* (two other books of Calvino which can be considered partial autobiographies). In 1973 (that is, before the first appearance of Palomar) Contardo Calligaris still considers Amerigo Ormea to be the clearest autobiographical figure of Calvino.²⁰⁷ In the view of Bolongaro, Palomar, ‘also represents a figure of the intellectual toward which Calvino has serious misgivings (...) a figure of the intellectual which Calvino wants to leave behind him so that he can move on.’²⁰⁸ Death, of course, impeded Calvino from ‘moving on’. Bolongaro goes on to say that anti-Calvinists

conveniently avoid discussing *La giornata*. In relation to Palomar, these criticisms identify the protagonist with the author too easily and then interpret the novel as a self-indulgent autocelebration rather than a thorough and even cruel liquidation of a type of intellectual in which Calvino projects aspects of himself so that he can condemn and discard them all the better.²⁰⁹

The interesting suggestion of Bolongaro can even be extended to ‘Calvinists’, who do not seem to read *Palomar* very differently from ‘anti-Calvinists’. Once again one could easily, if probably erroneously, ascribe predictive qualities to Calvino, who ‘warns’ in his *I livelli della realtà*:

Quanta parte dell’io che dà forma ai personaggi è in realtà un io a cui sono stati i personaggi a dar forma? Più andiamo avanti distinguendo gli strati diversi che formano l’io dell’autore, più ci accorgiamo che molti di questi strati non appartengono all’individuo autore ma alla cultura collettiva, all’epoca storica o alle sedimentazioni profonde della specie.²¹⁰

²⁰⁶ Lejeune, *Op. cit.*, pp. 49-50, also p. 171.

²⁰⁷ Calligaris, *Italo Calvino*, cit., p. 84.

²⁰⁸ Eugenio Bolongaro, ‘Italo Calvino and the Role of the Intellectual’, cit., p. 129.

²⁰⁹ Ivi, p. 138.

²¹⁰ Calvino, *Saggi*, cit., p. 391.

In fact, it seems that Palomar is shaping Calvino just as much as Calvino shaped Palomar, and that the specific socio-historical reading of Palomar by critics has come to define in large part Calvino's authorial figure. Whereas Bolongaro is convinced that Calvino's path was directed towards a growing attention to desire and the body as a means of knowing (a reading that is more in line with the posthumously published, unfinished *Sotto il sole giaguaro*), an overwhelming majority of critics tend to read *Palomar* almost exclusively in light of the concern with visibility, thereafter projecting these conclusions on the whole of Calvino's authorial persona and, consequently, oeuvre.²¹¹

Not infrequently, the importance of visibility in *Palomar* has evoked an image of the protagonist as one that only perceives phenomenologically, without intentions, not adding anything to the objective world, in an anti-anthropological project *par excellence*.²¹² This idea of Palomar explains also why Carlo Ossola conceives of him as the character of Calvino which most obviously 'incarna esattezza e consistency', linking Calvino's alleged fictional testament with his supposed non-fictional will.²¹³ The same seems to have happened with the overt concern of Calvino with 'visibility' in *Collezione di sabbia*, *Lezioni americane* and *Palomar*: this overriding concern has become a semantic sphere of great suggestion for critics, who point out the many existing interconnections.

This semantically dense field of references to visibility in turn seems to have led to what could be called a 'metonymization' of Palomar, who is seen as a 'wandering eyeball', reduced to 'puro sguardo': 'È come se la sua fosse una visività tranquilla, uno specchio tranquillo, in cui la realtà si riflette senza incresparsi.'²¹⁴ Claudio Milanini seems to agree with this interpretation: 'Palomar è uno sguardo (...) un occhio (...) assai più di un personaggio'.²¹⁵ This is a clear echo of what Calvino himself wrote years before, not about Palomar, but about Qfwfq, who is judged to be:

²¹¹ Bolongaro, 'Italo Calvino and the Role of the Intellectual', cit., p. 137; Cf. Epifanio Ajello, *Il racconto delle immagini: la fotografia nella modernità letteraria italiana* (Pisa: ETS, 2008), pp. 183-84; Cf. § 4.3 of this thesis for a discussion a different (critical) Palomar.

²¹² Cf. VV.AA., *Italo Calvino: atti del convegno internazionale*, cit., pp. 387-88, 391; Bucciantini, *Italo Calvino*, cit., p. 144.

²¹³ Carlo Ossola, *Molteplicità e coerenza: il lascito di Calvino al XXI secolo* (Turin: Giappichelli, 2010), p. 38.

²¹⁴ Ricci, 'Palomar by Italo Calvino', cit., p. 244; Calvino, *Romanzi e racconti: Vol. 2*, cit., p. xvii; VV.AA., *Italo Calvino: atti del convegno internazionale*, cit.

²¹⁵ Milanini, *Op. cit.*, p. 86

‘nemmeno un personaggio (...) un occhio’.²¹⁶ These words are also recycled by Giorgio Patrizi, who, however, tellingly adds a biographical nexus: ‘Palomar è una forma dello sguardo, un occhio (...) assai più che un personaggio, benché come il suo creatore possessa una moglie e una figlia, abbia abitato o abiti a Parigi o a Roma.’²¹⁷ The suggestion of the double link between Calvino and Palomar, who share gaze and surroundings, is crystal clear. In fact, Patrizi elaborates upon this connection:

È certo un’immagine emblematica quel che si attesta sulla copertina di una delle ultime opere di Italo Calvino: immagine scelta come figura specifica del testo a cui si riferisce ma anche immagine che se proiettata a ritroso sull’intero itinerario intellettuale ed artistico di Calvino, svela una singolare precisione iconica, appare come cifra rivelatrice.²¹⁸

Patrizi thus avowedly reads Palomar biographically and at the same time considers him to be a key character through which Calvino’s whole oeuvre can be (re)read. This is even more noteworthy when one considers Patrizi’s reference to the cover image of Dürer, which emphasizes (amongst other things) visibility and geometry.²¹⁹ The question is, however, if the conscious presence of palimpsest and intertextuality in *Palomar*, as well as of a knowing, ironic (implied) author, does not preclude such a purported ingenuity.

An autobiographical reading of Palomar is as obvious as it is problematic, as Francesca Serra critically brings into focus when she stresses: ‘l’equilibrio un po’ precario del meccanismo di scambio personaggio-autore, dovuto all’astrattezza quasi da *flatus vocis* di Palomar, e al conseguente, qui, ridondare a tratti ironicamente paternalistico di Calvino sul suo personaggio’.²²⁰ Exactly because of the fact that Palomar is ‘just’ this ‘flatus vocis’, this ‘gaze on the world’, an autobiographical reading seems straightforward and innocuous. However, even though Palomar’s adventures may be *referentially* linked to Calvino’s surroundings, this makes them only autobiographical in a very literally superficial way. The distinction between ‘referential’ (referring to biographical experiences and real environments) and ‘confessional’ (revealing how one thinks and who one is) is hardly ever made in this

²¹⁶ Calvino, *Romanzi e racconti*: Vol. 2, cit., p. 1318.

²¹⁷ Giorgio Patrizi, ‘Il modello della via lattea: note su Calvino saggista’, in *Tre narratori*, cit., pp. 73-88, p. 73; Cf. Francesca Serra, *Calvino e il pulviscolo di Palomar* (Florence: Le Lettere, 1996), p. 21.

²¹⁸ Patrizi, ‘Il modello della via lattea’, cit., p. 73.

²¹⁹ Cf. § 4.3 of this thesis.

²²⁰ Serra, *Calvino e il pulviscolo di Palomar*, cit., p. 35.

respect. Moreover, it is dangerously simplifying to reduce the authorial figure of Calvino to Palomar alone, something that seems to be happening with a surprising frequency in criticism.²²¹ The combination of the biographical reading of Palomar and the assertion that he is ‘simply’ an eye that registers the world around him, seems to have strongly influenced Calvino’s authorial image: to a large extent, Calvino has become a ‘Monsieur Teste’, as Palomar is often called precisely when he is considered to be ‘autobiographical’.²²² The idea of Calvino himself as an ‘eye that writes’ is widespread after the publication of Palomar, even if it should be pointed out that a similar view of Calvino was established before the ‘Palomar’ years by some critics. Already in 1970, Renato Barilli refers to Calvino simply as ‘occhio’.²²³ As in other cases, critics have lamented such an ‘easy’ reading of Calvino, claiming like Seamus Heaney that he is both an ‘I’ and an ‘eye’.²²⁴ Scholars such as Ulla Musarra-Schroeder and Ruggero Pierantoni have attempted to paint a more sensory-diverse picture of the character of Palomar, as well as of Calvino as a writer.²²⁵ Others, amongst whom JoAnn Cannon, have voiced their doubts about the biographic connection between Palomar and Calvino, as well as the unproblematic ‘objectivity’ of Palomar’s gaze.²²⁶ Dani Cavallaro even states that ‘in certain respects, *Mr. Palomar* could be read almost as a parody of the principle of Exactitude’, and Gore Vidal specifies (not distinguishing, however, between Palomar and Calvino): ‘he writes like a bookish, near-sighted man who has mislaid his glasses: objects held close to him are vividly described but the middle and the far distances of landscape and war tend to blur.’²²⁷ In this light, the title reference to a

²²¹ Cf. *ivi*, pp. 125-27.

²²² Cf. Mario Porro, ‘Letteratura come filosofia naturale’, in *Italo Calvino: enciclopedia, arte, scienza e letteratura*, ed. by Marco Belpoliti, special issue of *Riga*, 9 (1995), 253-82, p. 278; Kerstin Pilz, *Mapping Complexity: Literature and Science in the Works of Italo Calvino* (Leicester: Troubadour Publishing, 2005), pp. 59-60.

²²³ Renato Barilli, *La barriera del naturalismo: studi sulla narrativa italiana contemporanea* (Milan: U. Mursia, 1970), pp. 215-16; Cf. Goffredo Fofi, *Strade maestre: ritratti di scrittori italiani* (Rome: Donzelli, 1996), p. 178; Antonello, *Il ménage a quattro*, cit., p. 13.

²²⁴ Seamus Heaney, ‘The Sensual Philosopher’, *The New York Times*, 29 September 1985.

²²⁵ Ruggero Pierantoni, ‘Calvino’s Last Myth’, *Rivista di Studi Italiani*, 21.2 (2003), 185-96; Ulla Musarra-Schröder, *Italo Calvino tra i cinque sensi* (Florence: Cesati, 2010).

²²⁶ JoAnn Cannon, *Postmodern Italian Fiction*, cit., pp. 108-13.

²²⁷ Cavallaro, *The Mind of Italo Calvino*, cit., p. 133; Gore Vidal, ‘Fabulous Calvino’, in *Italo Calvino*, ed. by Harold Bloom (Broomall: Chelsea House Publishers, 2001), pp. 7-23, p. 8.

homonymous observatory in California becomes highly ironic, because Palomar is 'myopic, impatient and generally ill suited to his role'.²²⁸

The opinions set forth by these critics are more in accord with Bolongaro's view, in the sense that *Palomar* is seen as a depiction of the epistemological and ontological challenges inherent in 'mere' description, and a consequent questioning of 'objective' intellectual stances.²²⁹ Also through intertextual means Calvino seems to highlight the difficulty of objectively tracing the lines of the world. His 'un uomo si mette in marcia per raggiungere, passo a passo, la saggezza. Non è ancora arrivato.' on the back cover of *Palomar*, together with other passages of *Palomar*, suggests, in wording and implication, something strikingly similar to a passage from the epilogue of Borges' *El hacedor*:

A man proposes to himself the task of sketching the world. Through the years he populates a space with images of provinces, kingdoms, bays, ships, islands, fish, rooms, instruments, stars, horses and people. A little before his death, he discovers that this patient labyrinth of lines traces the image of his face.²³⁰

Similarly, Palomar does not escape the image of his own face, the web of images he inescapably creates as a translucent stratum around his eyes, even at the moment he dies. Calvino problematized objective viewpoints himself very early on in his career, for example in the story *L'occhio del padrone* from *Ultimo viene il corvo*, in which he writes: 'Ma a che serve un occhio, solo un occhio, staccato da tutto? Non vede nemmeno.'²³¹

From the above we can gather that critics are divided between seeing Palomar as an *objective* and an *objectivizing* character. This distinction is often blurred in analyses of the character, which is not only telling of common conceptions about objectivity, but also has important repercussions with regard to the Calvino-Palomar binary that has quickly gained ground in academic analyses. The Calvino-Palomar concatenation embodies not just a reading of Palomar, nor of Calvino's authorial figure or oeuvre, but also a concept of the role of realism in literature. In other words: broader critical values and discussions are at stake, even if not explicitly

²²⁸ Cannon, *Postmodern Italian Fiction*, cit., p. 100; Cf. John Hannay, 'Description as Science and Art: Calvino's Narrative of Observation', *Mosaic*, 21.4 (1988), 73-86, p. 83.

²²⁹ Ermanno Bencivenga, 'Philosophy and Literature in Calvino's Tales', in *Literary Philosophers*, cit., pp. 205-22, p. 215.

²³⁰ Italo Calvino, *Palomar* (Turin: Einaudi, 1983); Jorge Luis Borges, *Collected Fictions* (New York: Penguin Books, 1999).

²³¹ Calvino, *Romanzi e racconti: vol. 1*, cit., p. 195.

voiced. This comes to the fore in an enlightening passage from a book that Christopher Nash published only a couple of years after Calvino's (and Palomar's) death:

What counts is that by an intriguing process of thought, certain speculative and pragmatic intuitions in a certain epoch appear to have fallen into a surprising syncretic blend: *to be objective* (it's believed) *is to look at objects*; *to see things as objects* (it's believed) *is to be objective*. The two views have little logical connection; their psychological attraction to one another is potent. In Realistic discourses, a materialist vision and a rationalist vision for a historical moment coalesce. In telling what is after all always unreal because it's fiction, the solution is to reify it.²³²

Nash interestingly argues that there is not so much a logical, but more an intuitive, 'psychological', attraction to render objective what is merely objectifying. Nash adds that equity and levelness of regard, the attempt not to exclude anything, are a constitutive part of realist discourse and of what is considered to be objective. Studies about the cultural and historical strata of which 'objectivity' is made up have similarly pointed to concepts about objectivity in which, in fact, objectivity equals erasure of self, consideration of every superficial aspect of studied phenomena alike, a gaze that is led by what is presented to it and not by thoughts or preconceived categorizations.²³³ Palomar clearly attempts these pathways to objectivity that are a cultural patrimony of several centuries of scientific endeavours, but this does not mean that he succeeds in achieving his goal, nor that he represents Calvino or that Calvino (as person or writer or both) is in accordance with his fictional creation. Calvino clearly cues readers and critics about Palomar's concern with vision. He does this using the tools of a writer, amongst which metaphors take an important place, as Nash again reminds us: 'It's a critical commonplace that for the Realist the movement of narration has its analogy, *par excellence*, in the movement of the perceiving eye. That vision is taken to be *the* 'realistic sense'; and that the Realistic novel takes as its overriding metaphors the window, the mirror, the lens.'²³⁴ If we add the telescope, microscope and spectacles, we have a list of metaphors that Calvino uses time and again, and certainly not exclusively in Palomar, to stress his concern with vision. But these are not only metaphors: they also denote the media, the instruments that shape our vision, deforming as much as facilitating our sight.

²³² Christopher Nash, *World-Games: the Tradition of Anti-Realist Revolt* (London: Methuen, 1987), p. 23.

²³³ Cf. Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, *Objectivity* (New York: Zone Books, 2007), pp. 17, 34-37, 44, 138-40, 203-4.

²³⁴ Nash, *World-Games*, cit., p. 81.

Calvino had only to pick up a book of his beloved Galileo to convince himself of the infinite obstacles to ‘clear’, ‘objective’ vision. In other words, not so much the instruments to our knowledge, but the use that is being made of them is crucial, since it co-determines the way in which the images are interpreted by a gaze that is ‘impartial but never impersonal or inert’.²³⁵ Even though Palomar may seem a nobler, more philosophic, distinguished character than his ‘antenato’ Marcovaldo, he too fails every time in a clamorous, hardly glamorous, way.²³⁶ Instead, arguably, critics have tended to turn Palomar into an Agilulfo, a bodiless non-character that has been well described by Eugenio Bolongaro.²³⁷

The readings of Palomar are usually connected to interpretations of Calvino’s poetics. Implicit and explicit poetics are, however, completely different and rarely coincide. Therefore, it would be a mistake to read books only in the light of explicit poetics, as Umberto Eco reminds critics when he writes about *Dans le labyrinthe* of Alain Robbe-Grillet in ‘Calvino’s’ *Menabò*. Robbe-Grillet’s books interested Calvino precisely for the way in which they exacerbated and problematized the tense relation between fiction and description by *seemingly* adhering to a ‘mere’ descriptive, ‘objective’ project. Calvino was skeptical about such a hypothetical descriptive project and Eco agrees when he writes words that we can project not only onto *Dans le labyrinthe*, but also onto *Palomar*:

Il narratore non definisce le cose quale entità metafisica estranea priva di rapporto con noi; definisce anzi un particolare tipo di rapporto tra l’uomo e le cose, un nostro modo di “intenzionare” le cose, e anziché lasciare stare le cose le assume nell’ambito di una operazione formativa che è giudizio su di esse sull’uomo che le vede e non riesce a stabilire con esse il rapporto di un tempo ma intravede forse la via per un rapporto nuovo.²³⁸

Even though few critics uncritically accept Calvino’s explicit poetics, Calvino’s concern with visibility has nonetheless led to a parallel critical concern with visibility in his works that we might describe as ‘accurate but misleading’. Accurate, because

²³⁵ However, this aspect seems to be downplayed in most references. Cf. the following quote: ‘il corpo del signor Palomar sembra finire non con la testa, ma con uno strano dispositivo ottico, meccanico o elettronico. Forse una cinepresa, forse una telecamera. Forse un cannocchiale (...) O, più semplicemente, una versione miniaturizzata dello specchio del telescopio del monte Palomar di cui egli porta il nome.’; Antonio Costa, ‘Il senso della vista’, in *L’avventura di uno spettatore: Italo Calvino e il cinema*, ed. by Lorenzo Pellizzari (Bergamo: Pierluigi Lubrina, 1990), pp. 21-36, p. 24; Cf. Spinazzola, ‘L’io diviso’, cit., pp. 94-98.

²³⁶ Edmund Smyth, *Postmodern and Contemporary Fiction* (Batsford: The University of Michigan, 1991), pp. 76-77.

²³⁷ Bolongaro, *Italo Calvino*, cit., p. 138.

²³⁸ Umberto Eco, ‘Del modo di formare come impegno sulla realtà’, *Il Menabò* 5 (1962), 198-237, p. 231.

it cannot be denied that 'l'occhio che scrive' wrote frequently and intriguingly about vision and visibility, eyes and objectivity. Misleading, because in spite of the many critics who have proposed a Palomar that is not just an eye that objectively registers the world around him, this idea still seems very hard to shed, which is equally true for the inextricable and seamless connection between character and 'creator'. Beno Weiss, who reads many of Calvino's characters as his alter egos, writes emblematically about Calvino as a 'lucid rationalist who objectively views reality.'²³⁹ Even though in general it can be said that studies that are further removed from the text of *Palomar* are more likely to present a reading of Palomar as an eye, this is not always the case.

The blurring of boundaries between author and characters who become one in an atemporal, fictional unreality creates a critical node that is more and more complex, but at the same time less and less problematized. The following passage of Alberto Asor Rosa may serve as an emblem of this. Asor Rosa is discussing Calvino's *Il castello* when he comments:

Come è facile avvertire, lo strutturalistico-semiotico Calvino distingue tra la «pagina scritta» e il «dentro di me»: l'esistenza sopravvive accanto, o sotto, e comunque distintamente dall'esperienza scrittorica. Si potrebbe dire che, in prospettiva, questo è lo spiraglio attraverso cui s'affaccia un certo signor Palomar proprio nel momento in cui nel suo cervello – nel cervello di Palomar intendo dire – germoglia la fantasia di quel vero e proprio trionfo dell'immaginazione segnica, che sarà solo qualche anno più tardi *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore*.²⁴⁰

This labyrinthine passage warrants a close reading. Asor Rosa starts by stating that Calvino in *Il castello*, because of his structural-semiotic affinities, distinguishes between the page and his 'inner self'. He connects this conclusion to 'signor' Palomar (who is thereby more than ever turned into a proper person) and here Asor Rosa's analysis becomes more complex: in talking about Palomar, Asor Rosa is clearly suggesting that this character is Calvino, but in a curiously paradoxical way. The brain of Palomar according to Asor Rosa shines through in *Il castello* and in *this* brain grow the seeds of *Se una notte*: in other words, it is Palomar who conceives *Se una notte*, not Calvino, even though it is unclear to where Calvino has evaporated within the space of these phrases. At first stating that Calvino makes a distinction between the written and what cannot be written, Asor Rosa clearly accommodates this choice by making Calvino disappear in the shadow of his own fictional

²³⁹ Weiss, *Understanding Italo Calvino*, cit., p. 84.

²⁴⁰ Asor Rosa, *Stile Calvino*, cit., pp. 59-60.

creations. However, his spectre remains, something which the curious little phrase between dashes, and more specifically the perceived *need* for such a phrase, quite eloquently betrays. Moreover, Asor Rosa of course suggests that the closeness in time of these creations makes the connection somehow meaningful, because all is connected in the lived experience of the erased author, in *his* brain.

To some extent, the described phenomena seem to correspond to the ‘autonomous exegetic proliferation’ that George Steiner lamented in his *Real Presences*, but they are not based on critical studies alone: these studies feed as well on what the writer-as-author himself had to say about the book, in various guises and instances.²⁴¹ There is a curious constancy in critical readings that betrays the influence of unconscious ‘knowledge’ on interpretation. A similar situation thereby arises as to what Gaston Franssen has described for the critical reception of the works of Dutch twentieth-century poet Gerrit Kouwenaar:

Whereas his texts have been classified and interpreted in different ways, most readers appear to have some sort of ‘common sense’ knowledge about his work, which masques such interpretative differences of opinion. The interpretation of this poetry has been pre-structured to a high degree: there is a large group of professional readers who, although they contradict each other frequently, continuously adopt the same images, points of view/departure and techniques when commenting on the poems.²⁴²

The importance of these critical commonplaces, of the patterns in the critical reading of (certain volumes of) Calvino, as well as the weight that is being given to Calvino’s ‘testaments’, together seem to form a dense core of ‘directives’ for critics, which aprioristically influences the way in which Calvino is critically approached (whether positively or negatively) and more specifically the way in which his comments about his own works and that of others are treated. This last point will be explored in more detail in the next section.

²⁴¹ Cf. George Steiner, *Real Presences: Is There Anything in What We Say?* (London: Faber, 1989), p. 39.

²⁴² Franssen, *Gerrit Kouwenaar*, cit., p. 15 [Translation from Dutch is mine]; Cf. Booth, *Critical Understanding*, cit., pp. 244-45; Luca Marighetti, ‘Calvino difficile: saggio di estetica della recezione 1947-1985’, *Italianische Studien*, 10 (1987), 203-11.

1.4 Central and marginal Calvino: Calvino as editor and the paratextual Calvino

The quality of Calvino's writing has been frequently praised, but the quantity might be even more impressive. The 'eminently quotable author' has written a large amount of texts, of which his published fiction constitutes only a fraction.²⁴³

Similarly to George Orwell, Calvino – in his famously crystalline style – has said something about almost anything and anyone and every conceivable statement can be supported by a quote of either writer.²⁴⁴ Style is important in this respect, because a part of the authority of both writers derives from their status as model writers. This is obvious even in the detailed and precise analysis of Calvino's style by Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo, who gives many examples of Calvino's habit of correction, of his searching style, but in describing this style refers all the same to the often used 'precise'. Significantly, the criteria for this judgement in the final analysis seem to derive from the writer himself who (like Orwell) on several occasions shared his 'writing rules': 'ma diamo la parola allo scrittore se, come mi pare ovvio, ha anche definito se stesso indicando le qualità ottimali della buona prosa.'²⁴⁵

Another reason for the almost unavoidable temptation of critics to quote Calvino seems to stem from the symbiosis between Calvino and his fictional creations, the hybrid of his books and that which surrounds them, the conglomerate of which his authorial imprimatur is made up. An indication of this can be seen in the following critical passage: 'Attraverso scelte, chiose, note e quarte di copertina ha cercato di trasmettere una precisa idea di letteratura, dimostrando di essere un osservatore attento (...) uno scrutatore meticoloso della realtà in grado di registrare e catturare eventi (...) con l'ironico distacco di chi, come il Barone rampante...'²⁴⁶ Calvino is described here almost exclusively in his own terms, within the microcosm of his authorial image: he is an 'osservatore', a 'scrutatore', who looks with 'ironico distacco' at the world like his 'Barone rampante'. In these lines a clear triad of

²⁴³ Martin McLaughlin, *Italo Calvino*, cit., p. x.

²⁴⁴ Cf. Rodden, *Scenes from an Afterlife*, cit., p. 259; The *Lezioni americane* are a particularly abused text in this respect. Cf. Claudio Giunta's complaints about the 'citazionismo scrieteriato' that the *Lezioni* according to him evoke: Claudio Giunta, 'Ancora sulle Lezioni americane di Calvino', on: <http://www.leparoleele cose.it/?p=22818> (2 May 2016), p. 2; Cf. also Scarpa, *Italo Calvino*, cit., p. 144.

²⁴⁵ Mengaldo, 'Aspetti della lingua', cit., p. 55.

²⁴⁶ Maria Elena Palmisano, 'L'attività editoriale di Italo Calvino', in *"Andar per tracce": percorsi di lettura su Italo Calvino*, ed. by Vanna Zaccaro (Lecce: Pensa Multimedia, 2010) pp. 63-109, p. 69.

Calvino's books is contained, respectively *Palomar*, *La giornata d'uno scrutatore* and *Il barone rampante*. These terms, that are unquestionably and consciously calvinian, are used to describe his activity as promotor of an idea of literature. This idea, we can read between the lines, is one of 'observing from the outside' to 'register and capture' objectively what is happening around the writer. Both explicitly and implicitly, this quote thus shows how a 'palomarian' role (according to the tacit critical consensus as described in the previous section) seems to expand naturally to Calvino himself, *also* in criticism. This is confirmed by Olga Ragusa, when she writes that 'the rubric of "Calvino on Calvino" (...) makes the critic's work almost redundant'. She then goes on to claim, however, that 'it would be improper to speak of self-promotion' because of 'Calvino's impersonal chronicling of his literary and intellectual trajectory, by his factual, unemotional recounting of his professional activities'.²⁴⁷ Here, clearly, the practice of description of outward (and only in that sense, objective) realities is translated as 'objective description' and Calvino-Palomar becomes an 'impersonal chronicler' of his own career. This means that we can accept Calvino's account, since it is purportedly factual, and not subjective or meant for promotional purposes.

In this manner, 'impartial' Calvino imparts his 'precise' and 'clear' knowledge of his own books on readers and critics who are sufficiently receptive to his many 'extra-textual' comments. Critics tend to agree that 'the writing eye' does this so admirably, with arguments and counterarguments, that more often than not he preempts the critics' task.²⁴⁸ According to critical consensus, he manages time and again to be both 'part' and 'apart' of that which he describes.²⁴⁹ Calvino has, for example, been part of the Italian resistance as well as of neorealism, but through critical distance he can offer a final 'objective' view of a period (both historical and literary) that he has experienced himself. So far I have argued that a specific 'biographical' reading of the 'person' Calvino which shines through his books co-determines what critics think of his works, of the logic behind his 'trajectory'. To determine Calvino's own role in this process, a closer scrutiny of his editorial and broadly intellectual presence may be enlightening.

²⁴⁷ Olga Ragusa, 'Italo Calvino: the Repeated Conquest of Contemporaneity', in *Italo Calvino*, ed. by Harold Bloom, pp. 57-67, p. 58.

²⁴⁸ Cf. Calvino, *Romanzi e racconti: Vol. I*, cit., p. xxviii.

²⁴⁹ Cf. Ricci, *Approaches to Teaching the Works of Italo Calvino*, cit., p. 17.

The paradox that characterizes Calvino's authorial presence is in part a critical paradox, since it derives from the way critics have read and still read his works. Interestingly, the seemingly impossible combination of absence and presence, singularity and universality that we have encountered in critical readings of Calvino's volumes, analogously recurs time and again in discussions of his editorial presence. Until 1956 Calvino was a full-time employee of the influential publishing house *Einaudi*, thereafter he 'assunse una posizione tipicamente calviniana di influente interno-esterno, di autorevole presente e assente.'²⁵⁰ Calvino's authority was quickly accepted in the publishing house and he is described as often pronouncing the last word, the last verdict on important matters.²⁵¹ It is true that, in editorial meetings, Calvino kept himself 'discosto, sempre un po' a parte', but he was not a common marginal figure, he was 'marginale per partito preso'.²⁵² Similarly, Calvino has never been prominently present (at least, in a *physical* sense) in intellectual circles, but nonetheless he was far from an isolated figure.²⁵³

It is not without importance that Calvino's style often mimics this combination of absence and presence, for example in the 1964 preface that is an example of his 'correcting' style. By adopting this writing mode, Calvino is doing what Marielle Macé has termed 'sous-assertion' (which one could suggestively – if in part erroneously – translate quite literally as 'under-statement'). Macé with this term denotes instances in which a writer or essayist says without saying, stating something and then taking it back, leaving a trace that remains without being properly fixed on the page. Macé adds that this can be (and has often been) construed as a form of disengagement.²⁵⁴ Jennifer Burns concurs for the stylistic part of Macé's claim, stating that – in the case of Calvino – there is a 'rhythm of claim and counterclaim, or statement and "under"-statement' (note that she does not write understatement, but 'under'-statement). According to her, this forces the reader to adopt a 'willing application of disbelief', in reading these essays which (according to

²⁵⁰ Giulio Bollati, 'Calvino editore', in *Calvino & l'editoria*, ed. by Luca Clerici and Bruno Falcetto (Milan: Marcos y Marcos, 1993), pp. 1-19, p. 6.

²⁵¹ Gian Carlo Roscioni, 'Calvino editore', *Italo Calvino: atti del convegno internazionale*, cit., pp. 31-39, p. 36.

²⁵² Bollati, 'Calvino editore', cit., pp. 4, 1.

²⁵³ Cf. the opinions of Cesare Cases and Luigi Malerba as cited in: *Italo Calvino: atti del convegno internazionale*, cit., pp. 383, 394.

²⁵⁴ Marielle Macé, 'L'assertion ou les formes discursives de l'engagement', in *L'engagement littéraire: cahiers du groupe: 2005*, ed. by Emmanuel Bouju (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2005), pp. 61-74, p. 63.

Mario Barenghi) do not have any 'lezione da impartire' because Calvino is no 'organizzatore di cultura'.²⁵⁵ Put more negatively, as Joseph Francese does, one might say that Calvino is 'leapfrogging' from self-chosen margins.²⁵⁶

It is important to remember that the case of Calvino exemplifies a more general rule of marginality, which is 'not a condition that makes for disinterest, dispassion and objectivity.' Hence, marginality does not mean straightforward detachment, but 'ambiguous connection'.²⁵⁷ Moreover, it should be stressed that 'presence' in intellectual and artistic circles more often than not denotes a *textual* presence and in this respect Calvino has operated predominantly from a central position. As Philippe Daros points out: 'the place occupied by Calvino in the institution of literature (it is not without importance to recall that until the 1970s, he was member of numerous literary juries both in Italy and outside) intertextually put him at the heart of a galaxy of texts.'²⁵⁸ Even when he is physically distant, such as in the years that he lives in Paris, he continues to make his voice heard through journalistic activities, keeping his 'authorship' alive through his 'readership' (instead of 'displacing' the one with the other).²⁵⁹ Calvino's absent presence is critically read with a consistency that is normally reserved for 'paper authors', not actual persons; it has the deforming clarity of caricature and is adopted to describe both the author and the man.

Apparent marginality does not at all exclude factual centrality. Antonio Moresco, a self-proclaimed anti-Calvinist, has reinterpreted the Calvinian characters in the opposite way to that which we described so far, even if he too finds Calvino in his fictional creations: 'Il cavaliere è inesistente sì, ma stabilisce lo stesso rapporti galateali con il mondo esterno. Il barone è rampante sì, ma non per questo dimentica i suoi doveri di umanità rarefatta, ma pur sempre progressiva...'²⁶⁰ Calvino himself

²⁵⁵ Jennifer Burns, 'Telling Tales about «Impegno»: Commitment and Hindsight in Vittorini and Calvino', *The Modern Language Review*, 95.4 (2000), 992-1006, pp. 1000, 1006; Calvino, *Saggi*, cit., p. ix, xii.

²⁵⁶ Joseph Francese, 'The Engaged Intellectual', cit., pp. 163-79.

²⁵⁷ Michael Walzer, *Interpretation and Social Criticism* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1987), p. 37.

²⁵⁸ Philippe Daros, 'Les livres des autres ou soi-même comme un autre', *Littérature*, 92 (1993), 69-82, p. 70.

²⁵⁹ Cf. Jennifer Burns, 'A Leaden Silence: Writers' Responses to the *Anni di Piombo*', in *Speaking Out and Silencing: Culture, Society and Politics in Italy in the 1970s*, ed. by Anna Cento Bull and Adalgisa Giorgio, (London: Legenda, 2006), pp. 81-94, pp. 82, 89.

²⁶⁰ Moresco, *Il vulcano*, cit., p. 14.

avowed that he tried to turn eccentric characters such as Cosimo, the ‘barone rampante’, into universal symbols.²⁶¹ The critical currency of the preface of 1964 shows that he has certainly been highly effective in putting his consciously ‘eccentric’ views at the centre of literary criticism. Walter Pedullà, for example, sees Calvino as the writer who understood more than other writers and critics, precisely because of his eccentric vantage point, which, for Pedullà, puts him in a position to reassume several decades of the twentieth century.²⁶² He does this in a ‘Palomarian’ manner: ‘La sua eccentricità, che tanto gli era cara, consiste nell’occupare saldamente il centro da cui osservare l’Italia come regione dell’universo. È un centro collocato in posizione più elevata per vedere meglio il panorama, dalla distanza da cui si vede in trasparenza la struttura.’²⁶³

Calvino’s most important ‘absent’ presence was as an editor. At publishing houses like *Einaudi*, a continuous negotiation takes place between singularity and originality on the one hand and coherence, recognizability and communication with a public on the other hand. A letter of 22 November 1959 from New York to Giulio and Renata Einaudi shows Calvino’s awareness of the process that leads to a recognizable, editorial ‘image’:

Il patrimonio più prezioso di una casa editrice è il carattere, la fisionomia. (Il che sul piano commerciale si traduce nella capacità di crearsi, mantenere e accrescere un pubblico proprio) (...) Il tuo invito a una controproposta è parecchio impegnativo (...) soprattutto stando qui isolato, fuori da quella possibilità di verifica delle proprie idee che è data dal lavoro in comune.²⁶⁴

Two aspects of this fragment are particularly relevant in the context of this section: the fact that Calvino singles out the distinct character that makes the products of a particular publishing house recognizable and the suggestion that this road to distinction is paved by a collective, not by a series of individuals. That Calvino learned this lesson and similar ones in an editorial context is common knowledge in criticism, as well as the idea that he was a ‘model student’ in editorial terms who quickly became a supreme editorial model and master himself, who, through his

²⁶¹ Cf. Claude Imberty, ‘Calvino scrittore eccentrico’, *Narrativa*, 27 (2005), 31-49, p. 31.

²⁶² Pedullà, *Op. cit.*, pp. 17, 32.

²⁶³ Ivi, p. 19.

²⁶⁴ Calvino, *Lettere*, cit., p. 617.

editorial ‘lessons’ mirrored the ‘character’ of Einaudi like no other.²⁶⁵ According to critical consensus, Calvino was the ultimate ‘editore-narratologo’, who managed to contextualize every manuscript that was taken into consideration for publication, through his published and unpublished written comments.²⁶⁶

Calvino thus managed to combine roles that are not frequently combined with such consistency, authority and verve. As Alberto Cadioli writes in a book about the interaction between reader, writer and editor in which Calvino is (tellingly) often mentioned, this results in the blurring of a line that is normally rather clear: ‘L’opposizione scrittore-editore viene meno nel caso specifico dei letterati editori che scelgono i titoli per i propri testi. Forse l’esempio più significativo è offerto ancora da Italo Calvino.’²⁶⁷ Cadioli describes the editor as a mediator between those who write and those who read, but Calvino is also a writer and a reader and therefore in a privileged position. He can definitely be considered part of the category that Cadioli calls ‘l’editore iperlettore’, someone who effectively privileges ‘il modello di lettore che vuole rappresentare ma dando alla propria lettura un valore paradigmatico, poiché ha la piena possibilità di manifestarla attraverso le caratteristiche di una pubblicazione.’ The reading of this ‘editore iperlettore’ has the potential of becoming paradigmatic for readers who are confronted with a final product that clearly bears the (paratextual) stamp of its editor.²⁶⁸ But the influence of an editor is not entirely visible, on the contrary, it is in large part invisible to the reader: ‘consulenti editoriali’, who are often writer-critics such as Calvino, direct book series, give their professional opinions in ‘pareri di lettura’, judging ‘publicability’, which is a strange hybrid of market value and literary value, originality and readability. This means that editorial consultants are more often than not ‘saggiste nascosti’, as Cadioli calls them.²⁶⁹ It is true that Calvino is not unique in being editorially involved as an Italian writer: the link between Italian writers and the

²⁶⁵ Cf. Barbara Sghiavetta, *Editoria a testa alta: le quarte di copertina de “Gli struzzi”* (Bologna: Patron, 2008), pp. 54, 94-95, 142; Sergio Troiano, ‘Calvino editore: riflessioni sui paratesti calviniani’, *Incontri*, 30.1 (2015), 34-45.

²⁶⁶ Roscioni, ‘Calvino editore’, cit., p. 35.

²⁶⁷ Alberto Cadioli, *Le diverse pagine: il testo letterario tra scrittore, editore, lettore* (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 2012), pp. 213-14.

²⁶⁸ Cadioli, *Le diverse pagine*, cit., p. 49.

²⁶⁹ Cf. Ferretti, *La fortuna letteraria*, cit., p. 9; Gian Carlo Ferretti, *Siamo spiacenti: contro storia dell’editoria italiana attraverso i rifiuti* (Milan: Mondadori, 2012), pp. 45-58; Alberto Cadioli, ‘Il saggista nascosto: le lettere editoriali di Italo Calvino’, in *La saggistica degli scrittori*, cit., pp. 209-23, p. 209.

publishing industry traditionally tends to be tighter than in the Anglo-Saxon world.²⁷⁰ But the sheer range of Calvino's activities, the amount of years that he was editorially involved and his editorial productivity in those years make him special, if not unique, in this respect. A further example of Calvino's editorial tentacles is his involvement in the 'Notiziario Einaudi', a bulletin of Einaudi that was circulated to bookstores and libraries all over Italy. In the 'Notiziario' new books or editions were announced or anticipated, which included press reviews and brief summaries.²⁷¹

Another editorial activity that Calvino accepted on several occasions, is that of editor of book series or anthologies. As editor he was, amongst other projects, in charge of selecting and commenting on essays of Cesare Pavese, the best stories of Tommaso Landolfi, the 'highlights' of the *Orlando furioso*, a collection of fantastic tales and, most famously, a large collection of Italian fairy tales. Moreover, he directed *Centopagine*, a series of novellas. In this capacity, he was able to develop an editorial habit to see a series of books as one book, to invent a pattern, a sense and a coherence for books that would otherwise be rather loosely connected.²⁷² The effects of this selection can be far-reaching, as can be gathered from the example of the critical reading of Calvino's fairy tales which he rewrote and changed, sometimes quite radically, and to which he wrote a substantial preface: 'What then did reviewers of Calvino's book conclude about Italian folktales? They generally found what Calvino found.'²⁷³ This temptation to 'find what Calvino finds' in the many texts that he selected and commented upon seems to be more widespread than is generally recognized: Calvino combines his authority as a writer, reader and editor and often meaningfully and suggestively interweaves his different practices, so that it becomes 'tempting to reread Calvino's own literary *oeuvre* for traces of those texts he saw fit to anthologize.'²⁷⁴ Examples of this are indeed far too many to name.

Calvino is not only implicitly influential through his editorial selections, but also more explicitly through the thousands of introductions, cover texts and blurbs that he wrote throughout his career. The volume of Calvino's complete *Saggi* does

²⁷⁰ Weaver, 'Calvino: an Interview', cit., p. 30.

²⁷¹ Cf. Cesare Segre, 'Italo Calvino e il Notiziario Einaudi', in *Calvino & l'editoria*, cit., pp. 21-34.

²⁷² Cf. Cadioli, *Le diverse pagine*, cit., pp. 49-50; Claudio Milanini, 'L'editore di se medesimo', in *Italo Calvino: a Writer for the next Millennium*, ed. by Giorgio Bertone (Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 1998), pp. 67-78, pp. 72-73.

²⁷³ Mark Beckwith, 'Italo Calvino and the Nature of Italian Folktales', *Italica*, 64.2 (1987), 244-62, p. 257.

²⁷⁴ Jenny Webb, 'Poe, Calvino and the Dying Woman', *The Comparatist*, 35 (2011), 211-20, p. 211.

not even begin to make visible Calvino's presence on the margins of books that thousands of readers have picked up in book stores and libraries, if only because the pieces are neatly collected in one volume and one loses the sense of the diversity and range of their material presence. Like Vittorini, Calvino was a master of pungent, concise and (according to most critics) precise summaries of the content of a book. And like the towering Sicilian editorial example, Calvino managed to subtly contextualize books and writers, to sketch their socio-cultural setting and to suggest their meaning and value. He became a master in presenting or representing books, and used this mastery (as is only logical) when presenting his own works.

This mastery of presentation that seems almost effortlessly transferred to the realm of self-presentation can equally be deduced from images. Calvino was involved in deciding book covers as an editor, even when it came to his own books. His books have recognizable covers, which convey ideas about those books and about the connections between them.²⁷⁵ Again, Calvino usurps a role that is normally not a writer's but an editor's, making the covers part of the interpretative process, of the search for the author.²⁷⁶ The importance of these covers in giving Calvino a coherent authorial image is set forth by Mario Barenghi:

at that time the idea was still around that the principal feature of Calvino's work was its variety, its changeable nature (...) for me (...) Calvino gave instead an impression of consistency, even of homogeneity. I believe that a significant role was played by the book covers themselves, which had in common a kind of 'family resemblance', a style, or at least a taste.²⁷⁷

The first thing to notice here is that Barenghi too adopts the vague notion of 'style' to refer to the 'quid' that distinguishes Calvino and his covers. Calvino's covers are a source of homogeneity, Barenghi argues, overtly projecting the covers on Calvino's works, recognizing the importance of these 'superficial', 'external', 'parergon'-parts of Calvino's oeuvre.²⁷⁸ Because it is recognizable, critics can pick up on the calvinian 'style', which in this way can be easily promulgated. The editorial spread of the style of Calvino's book covers is the most tangible effect of this propagation

²⁷⁵ Cf. Nicoletta Leone, 'Le copertine di Calvino: altri mondi possibili', *Autografo*, 36 (1998), 49-66;

²⁷⁶ Cf. Giorgio Baroni and Andrea Rondini, *L'Orlando comprato: manuale di sociologia della letteratura* (Turin: Società Editrice Internazionale, 1998), p. 89.

²⁷⁷ Mario Barenghi, 'From Picasso to Dürer: Calvino's Book Covers', in *Image, Eye and Art in Calvino: Writing Visibility*, ed. by Brigitte Grundtvig, Martin McLaughlin and Lene Waage Petersen (London: Legenda, 2007), pp. 202-11, p. 203.

²⁷⁸ Cf. Ragusa, 'The repeated Conquest', cit., p. 59.

‘quasi che gli editori abbiano adottato la scelta calviniana come una sorta di matrice iconografica su cui innestare le proprie varianti’.²⁷⁹

There seems to be a special place where Calvino’s authorial mixture of absence and presence thrives, the place that he sought out during his editorial and writing career, at the margins of texts. This marginal, indirect omnipresence in many respects seems more efficient than a hypothetical equivalent of central, direct presence, which can never become similarly ubiquitous. The argument here is that this marginal presence is not just an editorial reality, but very much also a *critical* one. Moreover, the one does not exclude the other: critics too write *and read* books that are framed editorially in a specific manner.

The margins of critical volumes analogously host the Palomarian presence of the silent, Ligurian author, watching over critical debates that do not seem to concern him personally. It is intriguing to note the sheer frequency with which Calvino is quoted on back covers of books, in epigraphs, introductions or conclusions. In some occasions, such as Diane Elam’s *Romancing the Postmodern*, Calvino is only present on the book cover, and hardly at all within the book itself (except for one reference).²⁸⁰ Similarly, in a volume about eroticism in literature, Calvino is not treated at all in the volume, but he nonetheless frames the volume with his judgements on the theme in the introduction.²⁸¹ In a book of Gregory Lucente, the title implies that the volume ends with Calvino, whereas it does not: titles that end with Calvino are not uncommon in criticism, turning him into the ‘pietra sopra’ a certain period or development.²⁸² Sometimes Calvino is linked to a certain theme,

²⁷⁹ Fabio Gambaro, ‘Illustrare l’invisibile: le copertine delle *Città invisibili*’, in *La visione dell’invisibile: saggi e materiali su Le città invisibili di Italo Calvino*, ed. by Mario Barenghi, Gianni Canova and Bruno Falcetto (Milan: Mondadori, 2002), pp. 96-103, p. 99.

²⁸⁰ Diane Elam, *Romancing the Postmodern* (London: Routledge, 1992).

²⁸¹ Nicola Catelli, Giulio Iacoli and Paolo Rinoldi (eds.), *Verba tremula: letteratura, erotismo, pornografia* (Bologna: Bononia University Press, 2010); Cf. Francesca Billiani, *Culture nazionali e narrazioni straniere: Italia, 1903-1943* (Florence: Le Lettere, 2007); Rolando Caputo, ‘Literary Cineastes: The Italian Novel and the Cinema’, in *The Cambridge Companion to the Italian Novel*, ed. by Peter Bondanella and Andrea Ciccarelli (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 182-96; Marleen Barr, *Afro-Future Females: Black Writers Chart Science Fiction’s Newest New-Wave Trajectory* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2008) pp. ix, xi, xii, 245-49.

²⁸² Gregory Lucente, *Beautiful Fables: Self-Consciousness in Italian Narrative from Manzoni to Calvino* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1986); Eugenia Paulicelli, *Parola e immagine: sentieri della scrittura in Leonardo, Marino, Foscolo, Calvino*, (Florence: Cadmo, 1996); André Brink, *The Novel: Language and Narrative from Cervantes to Calvino* (London: Macmillan Press, 1998); Cf. Pierpaolo Antonello and Simon Gilson (eds.), *Science and Literature in Italian Culture: From Dante to Calvino* (Oxford: Legenda, 2004); Federica Pedriali, *La farmacia degli incurabili: da Collodi a Calvino* (Ravenna: Longo, 2006).

which is not studied in his works but on which he nonetheless commented, comments that are quoted as an authoritative ‘gate’ to the study itself.²⁸³ In other instances, his comments on writers that were near to him, artistically or biographically, frame a critical work.²⁸⁴ The first word of Calvino is mirrored by the last word that he often receives: the habit of ending with Calvino is especially ingrained in anthologies and handbooks.²⁸⁵ Logically, the different ‘values’ of the *Lezioni americane* prove to be particularly popular as marginal categories in critical volumes, for example as ‘categorie euristiche su cui misurare le produzioni dei narratori recenti’.²⁸⁶

There are several possible reasons for Calvino’s prominent position at the margins of books, besides his mere authority as an author-critic, the fact that he filled this position already as an editor and that his authorial image, the distant, ‘objective’ intellectual, fits the role perfectly. His ideas are often the (avowed) seed from which a critical volume stems. This means that many critical volumes are written, so to speak, ‘under the auspices’ of Calvino, with Calvino in the role of the element which holds the book together or the person who determined the premise upon which the book’s main argument is built. This is the case for the books of Guido Bonsaver, Olivia Santovetti and the article of Rolando Caputo that are contained in the previous footnotes, but also of numerous other critical studies.²⁸⁷ This is even true for volumes about Calvino himself, such as in the monographs of Martin McLaughlin or Contardo Calligaris.²⁸⁸ In the case of Francesca Serra’s critical volume about *Palomar*, the structure follows that of the book that is discussed and every section is opened (consciously) with a quote of Calvino ‘che dovrebbe fornire allo svolgimento del tema l’esca di partenza e anche un reiterato stimolo di fondo.’²⁸⁹

²⁸³ Cf. Santovetti, *Digression*, cit.

²⁸⁴ Cf. Guido Bonsaver, *Elio Vittorini: the Writer and the Written* (Leeds: Northern Universities Press, 2000).

²⁸⁵ Cf. Zygmunt Baranski and Lino Pertile, *The New Italian Novel* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993); Eric Haywood and Cormac Ó Cuilleain, *Italian Storytellers: Essays on Italian Narrative Literature* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1989).

²⁸⁶ Roelens, *Piccole finzioni*, cit., p. 7; Cf. Patrizia Landi, *Con leggerezza ed esattezza: studi su Leopardi* (Bologna: CLUEB, 2012).

²⁸⁷ Cf. Antonello, *Il ménage a quattro*, cit.; Leonardo Terrusi, *I nomi non importano: funzioni e strategie onomastiche nella tradizione letteraria italiana*, (Pisa: ETS, 2012); Pietro Greco, *L’astro narrante: la luna nella scienza e nella letteratura italiana* (Milan: Springer, 2009); Giuseppe Sandrini, *Le avventure della luna: Leopardi, Calvino e il fantastico italiano* (Venice: Marsilio, 2015).

²⁸⁸ McLaughlin, *Italo Calvino*, cit.; Calligaris, *Op. cit.*, p. 110.

²⁸⁹ Serra, *Op. cit.*, p. 10.

These examples betray Calvino's immense critical authority, which seeps through in a formula which one can encounter without much effort in critical papers on the most diverse topics. Stripped down to its skeleton, the formula reads as follows: 'for X is true what C [Calvino] said of Y'. The following quote may serve as a clear example of this formula: 'Rather one might say of Malerba's fiction what Calvino says of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*.'²⁹⁰ Calvino serves as the superconductor that connects the most disparate materials. Part of the importance of this lies in the ease with which similar formulae are adopted when writing about Calvino himself: 'We could say about Calvino – particularly his *Memos* – what Calvino himself said about Elio Vittorini in his 1967 essay...'.²⁹¹ Several aspects catch the eye in this short fragment: Calvino's words not only seem to possess a universal validity (what he says about Vittorini can just as easily be projected upon himself) but also a timeless value, since an essay from 1967 can provide us with the key to read Calvino as a whole, or more specifically his *Memos*. Apparently, the distinction between 'Calvino', the author-as-oeuvre, and the *Memos* is hardly relevant. Calvino's words are considered valid for all times and contexts, but at the same time precise and clear. His 'style' serves the twofold purpose of the unique and the universal with an astonishing naturalness. Sometimes the formula is adopted in a rather dizzying, indirect way, that eloquently betrays the attractive combination of authority and intertextuality that it embodies, such as when Francesca Serra writes that: 'anche di Calvino si potrebbe dunque dire in un gioco a incastro di rimandi letterari, ciò che egli stesso dice di Queneau'.²⁹² Serra here refers to Calvino's statement about Queneau, namely that when Queneau talks about Flaubert he is actually also talking about himself. Serra is thus arguing along the same lines as I am here, and the message is actually pretty straightforward: Calvino, in writing about others, also writes about himself. But Serra conveys this message in a Chinese-box formula of which the content is basically irrelevant: what counts is the critical 'meta'-import of this 'gioco a incastro' which Serra is more than willing to play.

Among the 'key-concepts' that define Calvino's uniquely universal style, the chapter titles of the *Lezioni americane* are particularly well-suited for quotations. To illustrate this with one example, one could take the calvinian category that has

²⁹⁰ Cannon, *Postmodern Italian Fiction*, cit., p. 150.

²⁹¹ Lucia Re, 'Calvino and the Value of Literature', *MLN*, 113.1 (1998), 121-37.

²⁹² Serra, *Op. cit.*, p. 198.

perhaps been most successful (although fluctuations exist in the critical circulation of the various categories and this category has been particularly scrutinized by opponents): 'leggerezza'. 'Leggerezza' is a highly debated term, but also highly influential: if a writer has a style that is characterized as 'light', a reference to Calvino is seldom far away. For this reason, very different writers (with respect to each other and with respect to Calvino) have been tied to Calvino's 'poetics of lightness' (or rapidity or multiplicity), such as Antonio Tabucchi, Alessandro Baricco and Stefano Benni.²⁹³ This is equally true in the Anglo-Saxon critical context.²⁹⁴ Recently, Kadir Djelal has even called the memos, to which he refers in the title of his book, an 'instruction manual'.²⁹⁵ As the many phone calls to Calvino's wife from people 'converting to leggerezza' indicate, the memos have an appeal which often goes beyond the borders of literature.²⁹⁶ Like Kundera, Calvino has become a household name for those who write under the sway of lightness, someone to be reckoned with in every philosophy that propagates lightness.²⁹⁷

A suggestion of John Rodden about George Orwell's influence in current society seems to be valid as well in the curious case of Calvino (and, thus, about C is valid what X said about Y): 'If Orwell is less visible today than he was twenty years ago, it is not because his influence has waned. It is rather an ironic tribute to the writer as legislator of human-kind, attesting to the fact that our culture has ever more fully absorbed the vision and sensibility of his work and life.'²⁹⁸ The case of Calvino not only eloquently shows the tides of (critical) reputation and circulation, but also the indirect ways in which a writer that is not explicitly mentioned can still preside over, or be present in, critical debates. Calvino's critically negotiated authorial figure of someone who is absently present, who watches from a distance over (critical) disputes, proves attractive to critics as well. One might argue that this is not so

²⁹³ Cf. Giovanni Palmieri, 'Per una volatile leggerezza: il «lato manco» di Antonio Tabucchi', in *Piccole finzioni*, cit., pp. 125-36; Annick Paternoster, 'Terra! di Stefano Benni: viaggio nella leggerezza cosmica', *Piccole finzioni*, cit., pp. 191-95; Nella Giannetto, *"Oceano mare" di Baricco: molteplicità, emozioni, confini tra Calvino e Conrad* (Milan: Arcipelago, 2004).

²⁹⁴ Cf. David Young, 'The Crystal and the Flame', *Field: Contemporary Poetry and Politics*, 42 (1990), 82-99; Brian Bartlett, 'A Dog's Nose of Receptiveness: a Calvinoesque Reading of Don McKay', *Antigonish Review*, 139 (2004), 123-37.

²⁹⁵ Kadir Djelal, *Memos from the Besieged City: Lifelines for Cultural Sustainability* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2010).

²⁹⁶ Martin McLaughlin, 'Lightness and Multiplicity: the Origin and Development of Calvino's Poetics', *Rivista di Studi Italiani*, 21.2 (2003), 42-58, p. 56.

²⁹⁷ Cf. Laura Campanello, *Leggerezza* (Milan: Mursia, 2015); Beniamino Mirisola, *Lezioni di caos: forme della leggerezza tra Calvino, Nietzsche e Moresco* (Venice: Edizioni Ca' Foscari, 2015).

²⁹⁸ Rodden, *Scenes from an afterlife*, cit., p. x.

surprising, since critics have co-created this image and are thus most susceptible to the language in which it is formulated. The impossible, literary paradoxes, the oscillations and nuances in Calvino's presentation are thoroughly indebted to the paradoxes and oscillations in the field of criticism, and have themselves grown into something like critical absolutes. In several respects, critics are implicated in a two-way editorial context, before and after the publication of a book.²⁹⁹ The formation of an authorial figure is a process of critical tensions below the surface, of both erosion and accumulation, but it does not derive from texts alone, because critical values are inexorably implicated. These reflections open up further questions about canons, both national and transnational, genre-bound and universal, that will be addressed in the following chapters.

²⁹⁹ Cf. Bucciandini, *Op. cit.*, pp. 88-90; Ferretti, *Il best seller all'italiana*, cit., pp. 25-26.

2.1 Calvino working towards a canon: poetics and elective affinities

Poetics and canon are tightly interwoven entities and never entirely separable. Delineating a poetics automatically implies positioning an author between different canons. They do not simply exist next to each other, as complementary realities, but take shape with respect to each other, shifting and metamorphosing in patterns that are to some degree predictable, but never static. Therefore, when Ulrich Schulz-Buschhaus argues that Calvino's *canon* shows a high degree of constancy, whereas his *poetics* are continually shifting, in my view he dehistoricizes both and oversimplifies their mutually dependent complexity.³⁰⁰ This section will be dedicated to showing some different shades and shapes that Calvino's poetics and canon took on in the course of his career and the critical meaning of that.

The first theoretical issue to address is the term 'canon', which denotes a misleading monolith that simply does not exist:

The canon as monolith is a fiction or myth which allows contemporary critics to get along with business of teaching and talking about literature (...) For an academic criticism which energetically and eagerly broadcasts its 'revisionary', 'subversive', even 'revolutionary' credentials, a mythical being called 'the canon' fulfills a suitably fetishized role.³⁰¹

Canon as a singularized abstraction serves a function, namely that of being able to present alternatives to a set of texts that is perceived as 'established'. Hence its somewhat paradoxical renewed popularity in gender-, queer- and postcolonial studies – albeit as antagonist, as dominant corpus of white western male texts.³⁰² Canon, as art historian Ernst Gombrich argued, is a functional and inescapable element of both aesthetic creation and audience response.³⁰³ Nevertheless, it also serves as a fiction, a fetish of sorts, that obscures the 'circulation and function of actual historical canons in specific communities, institutions, and individual critical careers'.³⁰⁴ In other words, canon is always inescapably social and plural: one should rather talk about canons, that relate to each other in different manners and through different degrees of

³⁰⁰ Ulrich Schulz-Buschhaus, *Zwischen »resa« und »ostinazione«: zu Kanon und Poetik Italo Calvino* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1998), pp. 8-9.

³⁰¹ Jan Gorak, *The Making of the Modern Canon: Genesis and Crisis of a Literary Idea* (London: Athlone, 1991), p. 87.

³⁰² Cf. Amilcare Iannucci, 'The Italian Canon Abroad', *Quaderns d'Italia*, 4/5 (1999/2000), 47-65, pp. 47-51.

³⁰³ Cf. Gorak, *The Making of the Modern Canon*, cit., p. 90.

³⁰⁴ Ivi, p. ix.

antagonism.³⁰⁵ Furthermore, alternatives to the supposed monolith tend to cluster in what Jan Gorak calls ‘countercanons’, which are based on ‘conformity to established patterns of nonconformity’.³⁰⁶ The prismatic diffusion of the canon in different competing strands of canons and countercanons that Gorak theorizes brings the concept of ‘canon’ suddenly very close to ‘poetics’, which, even if not explicitly invented by authors, will certainly be attributed to them by critics in an intertextual network of lines that interlace. Poetics help to define an authorial profile, to denote elective affinities, to tie her or him to authors of the past pertaining to different canons.

Herein we can identify a possible, important difference between stardom and canonization, or ‘regular’ stardom and academic stardom. Jeffrey Williams argues that ‘stardom claims no lineage’, whereas canonized authors clearly need such a lineage in order to be accepted into the canon, it is a perpetual negotiation between absolute and relative value, uniqueness and tradition. Moreover, whereas ‘normal’ stardom tends to rely prevalently on visibility (which we might re-cast, more Calvino-like, as ‘visibility’), status within an academic context is often more accurately measured in what Williams calls ‘citationality’. Calvino’s ‘citationality’ is one of his most characteristic aspects, and many of Williams’ examples (name recognition through well-known terms and phrases, a recognizable ‘signature’, as well as adjectification of one’s name) seem to pertain to Calvino.³⁰⁷

Viktor Shklovsky already argued in the 1920s for a view of literary history as quintessentially a process of perpetual canonization of the marginal.³⁰⁸ Another way of stating this is that canonization is the promotion of an exceptional singularity to universality.³⁰⁹ However, even in this case it is important to point out that there is not just one countercanon that displaces one canon, but rather a series of countercanons that discontinuously and imperfectly displaces a range of co-existing canons. There is, in other words, a multiplicity of canons, both on the side of production and on the

³⁰⁵ Cf. Di Nicola, ‘Il canone inverso’, p. 68.

³⁰⁶ Gorak, *Op. cit.*, p. 76.

³⁰⁷ Williams, *Op. cit.*, pp. 378, 383-85; Trevor Ross, *The Making of the English Canon: From the Middle Ages to the Late Eighteenth Century* (Montreal; London: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1998), pp. 19-20, 28.

³⁰⁸ Ivi, p. 54.

³⁰⁹ Korthals Altes, ‘Slippery Author Figures’, *cit.*, p. 100; Compagnon, *Op. cit.*, p. 33.

side of reception.³¹⁰ These canons of different parties (which include editorial canons and what we might broadly term ‘canons of circulation and communication’) interlace and Italo Calvino is, again, a productive ‘partisan’ of various sides. It is certainly no coincidence that we find him prominently on the back cover of the *Penguin Modern Classics: the Complete List* of 2011. On the first page of the volume we find another Calvino quote and his essay, ‘Why read the classics’, is included as a sort of prescription of how the list should be judged and appreciated.³¹¹

As with other concepts discussed so far, poetics will not be seen in a vacuum, as if Calvino’s poetics pertain to him exclusively. Rather they are an expression of his way of being a writer, which relates to the myriad ways that other writers have manifested their authorship before him. Poetics are thus a moving assemblage of individual and social pieces that intermingle and imbricate. In Calvino’s case it seems particularly tempting to describe his poetics in terms of the many writers which he himself commented upon. His poetics self-consciously stem not exclusively from him, a fact that critics have certainly built upon. An attempt at a summary of the poetics of Calvino often reads as a dazzling compound of dozens of writers’ names within the space of an article or book chapter.³¹²

Such dazzling compounds of writers’ names bring into mind (again) the *Lezioni americane*, which represent, amongst other things, an incredibly dense list of names, names of famous writers, artists and scientists. We have seen that the *Lezioni* are generally considered to be a literary testament, which can also be translated as a sort of ‘ultimate poetics’. But quite a few critics have actually read it even as a ‘personal canon’, effectively blurring the lines between canon and poetics. As ‘ultima tappa’, the *Lezioni* are for example described as follows by Alberto Asor Rosa in an interview about the canon: ‘Cos’altro sono le *Lezioni americane* di Italo Calvino (...) se non un vero e proprio canone letterario e poetico, o, in quanto meno, un atlante degli autori più significativi dall’antichità ai nostri giorni.’³¹³ Regardless

³¹⁰ Vittorio Spinazzola, ‘La valorizzazione letteraria’, in *Pubblico 1987: produzione letteraria e mercato culturale*, ed. by Vittorio Spinazzola (Milan: Rizzoli, 1987), pp. 179-216, p. 213.

³¹¹ *Penguin Modern Classics: the Complete List* (London: Penguin Books, 2011).

³¹² Leonardo Lattarulo, ‘La poetica di Calvino’, in *I luoghi di Calvino. Guida alla lettura di Italo Calvino*, ed. by Nicola Bottiglieri (Cassino: Università degli Studi di Cassino, 2001), pp. 55-91; Martin McLaughlin, ‘Calvino’s Library: Labyrinth or Laboratory?’, in *Italian Storytellers*, cit., pp. 263-87.

³¹³ VV.AA., ‘Il canone dei classici: conversazione di Corrado Bologna con Alberto Asor Rosa’, in *Critici del Novecento: atti del colloquio 4 dicembre 2008*, ed. by Noemi Billi and Federica Rossi

of Calvino's actual intentions with these lectures (a problem which I discussed in section 1.3), they have certainly contributed to his critical reputation as an 'indefatigable systematizer' of literary currents.³¹⁴

Not only do critics create and criticize canons, authors do so as well. Dante is a famous example from the Italian literary tradition of an author who invented his own canon, making use of his *auctoritas* in a double sense, becoming a proponent of a 'canone a parte obiecti'.³¹⁵ Such a canon is created by Calvino as well, as we can gather from a pertinent remark of the aforementioned Asor Rosa about the *Lezioni*: 'Osserverò ancora che in questo "pantheon" dei classici d'ogni tempo e paese, gli unici italiani citati da Calvino sono G. Cavalcanti, Dante, Petrarca, Boccaccio, Leonardo, Galilei, Leopardi, Montale, Gadda e... se stesso.'³¹⁶ It is crystal clear that Asor Rosa suggests that Calvino is not 'merely' naming names that have inspired him, he is also including himself in a select group, 'decimo tra cotanto senno' one might say. In rhetorical terms we can call this 'parasitic citation', which denotes

an appeal to some prior authority, the function of which is to invest the present speaker with the weight of the prior authority and also with the status of an authority in her own right, as she becomes the representative not of herself as an individual but rather of the *institutionally agreed* force of taste and, *ipso facto*, correctness and legitimacy.³¹⁷

By reusing and recasting these classic, well-known names, Calvino is playing the centuries-old literary game of paying tribute and elevating oneself, of making claims to an originality *rooted in* tradition, in the choice of a specific tradition, thus tracing personal patterns in the diversified history and reality of canons.³¹⁸ These lists prove highly attractive and meaningful to critics, who themselves are professionally engaged with the very same canonizing practice and therefore especially suited to elaborate upon and explain such sets of names, thereby echoing, spreading and copying them. However the list in itself does not tell the tale of how it came into

(Bologna: Aspasia, 2011), pp. 523-38, p. 532; Cf. Ugo Olivieri (ed.), *Un canone per il terzo millennio: testi e problemi per lo studio del Novecento tra teoria della letteratura, antropologia e storia* (Milan: Mondadori, 2001), p. xxv.

³¹⁴ Enrique Unamuno, 'Italo Calvino y su lectura de Borges: historia de una canonización', *Exemplaria: Revista de Literatura Comparada*, 5 (2001), 51-73, p. 54 [Translation mine].

³¹⁵ Romano Luperini, *Breviario di critica* (Naples: Guida, 2002), pp. 81-82.

³¹⁶ Alberto Asor Rosa (ed.), *Letteratura italiana: Vol. 1. dalle origini al Novecento* (Turin: Einaudi, 1992), p. li.

³¹⁷ Thomas Docherty, 'Authority, History', cit., pp. 53-71, pp. 58-59.

³¹⁸ Cf. Lipking, *Op. cit.*, pp. 133-91.

being, on the contrary, by its very nature it obscures this multi-layered, continuous genesis. This is what Lawrence Rainey points out when he writes about similar lists:

Yet there is something unsatisfying about such lists, which never extend to more than fifteen names (...) they possess a liturgical mantra-like quality, as if the series of names could invoke a magical power to ward off something forbidden, something to be excluded by this very act of repetitive naming (...) they have been removed from the world of historical contingency and have entered a timeless realm that is free of accident, devoid of change, and impervious to the mutations of mundane life.³¹⁹

An important aspect of what Rainey outlines here is the purported timelessness of the canonized author, who is cut off from broader historical and social narratives and becomes part of the detached narrative of literary genealogies and – histories. This name-dropping, by both Calvino and critics, may in part have catapulted Calvino ‘da scrittore atipico velocissimamente a grande classico’.³²⁰ Calvino has quickly become a ‘canonical paradigm’, a term that Franco Ricci applies to Calvino and that unites the normative, the formative and the distinctive.³²¹ When Calvino is considered as part of a national canon of high literature, his quickly gained ‘intemporale classicità novecentesca’ is further reinforced.³²² Temporality starts again after Calvino, who constitutes the outer fringe of the Italian canon, as his aforementioned place at the end of anthologies and literary histories eloquently illustrates.³²³

As writer, critic and editor Calvino was involved in various different realms of canonization and he did not shy away from giving opinions and directions in any one of them. An important medium for these canonical negotiations are certainly his editorial letters, in which the bipolar logic of how the book discussed or writer addressed relates to Calvino’s own ideas is always (necessarily) adopted and the comparison with his own literary practice is never far away.³²⁴ Nevertheless, a potential problem with such a reading in the light of canonical issues is that we can attribute all kinds of strategic behaviour to Calvino which are ‘corroborated’ a posteriori by his successful ‘quest’ for canonization. It is important to bear in mind

³¹⁹ Rainey, *Institutions of Modernism*, cit., p. 43; Cf. Inger Østenstad, ‘Quelle importance a le nom de l’auteur’, *Argumentation et Analyse du Discours [En Ligne]* (2009), URL: <http://aad.revues.org/662>

³²⁰ Barengi, *Le linee e i margini*, cit., p. 7.

³²¹ Franco Ricci, ‘Calvino and Paul Klee’, *Rivista di Studi Italiani*, 21.2 (2003), 151-63, p. 151.

³²² Raffaele Manica, *Exit Novecento: una raccolta di saggi* (Rome: A. Gaffi, 2007), p. 75.

³²³ The newspaper-title *Il buio dopo Calvino* for an interview with Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo about contemporary Italian literature in the *Corriere della Sera* repeats this established narrative, but even more correct might have been ‘Il tempo dopo Calvino’; Cf. Paolo di Stefano, ‘Il buio dopo Calvino’, *Corriere della Sera*, 23 August 2015.

³²⁴ Bertone, *Italo Calvino*, cit., p. 53.

that Calvino was not born a classic and did not always have the authority that he had towards the end of his life and after his death. The point is not so much to ‘accuse’ Calvino of carefully plotting and continuously mapping his route to canonization (as opposed to other, purportedly more ‘naïve’ writers), but rather to gain an insight into the ‘side-effects’ of different literary activities and more specifically their possible repercussions for literary criticism. For example, when Federico Enriques writes that Calvino did not want to include himself in an anthology for Zanichelli in 1969 (an anthology which will be discussed in more detail in chapter 3), but also excludes other Italian contemporaries, the temptation to read a canonical struggle beneath the surface of this decision can be hard to resist. However, this would be an extremely biased and one-sided reading of intentions that are almost never so clear and univocal. Nonetheless, it would be equally biased to ignore all similar instances as aprioristically uninteresting. Both sides have been advocated in Calvino criticism, one side arguing that Calvino is an essentially antinormative, peripheral writer by vocation who ‘accidentally’ becomes a classic, almost in spite of himself.³²⁵ The other side maintains the image of a Calvino as a master-strategist who cunningly determined the conditions for his own canonization (a contention that caused a great amount of heated critical debate at the publication of Carla Benedetti’s *Pasolini contro Calvino*, which will be addressed in more detail in the next section).³²⁶

The idea that Calvino was ‘born classic’ is hard to shed, even though John Woodhouse and Andrea Dini have pointed out that also in Calvino’s career literary prizes brought to the fore evaluations (and, therefore, critical tensions underlying those evaluations) in a more overtly controversial manner.³²⁷ Sometimes Calvino was an integral part of the creation of controversy, for example by refusing the Viareggio prize in 1968 (at a point when he was already quite a well-known and established writer).³²⁸ In a broader sense, Calvino has certainly nudged critics along towards the conclusion that he was ‘nato classico’, by stressing in interviews and autobiographical pieces that everything has been easy for him from the beginning of

³²⁵ Cf. Mario Barenghi in: Calvino, *Sono nato*, cit., p. xi; Giovanna Rizzarelli, ‘Le Lezioni americane di Italo Calvino: il testamento apocrifo’, *Paragone*, 45-46-47 (2003), 147-71, p. 169.

³²⁶ Cf. Carla Benedetti, *Pasolini contro Calvino: per una letteratura impura* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1998).

³²⁷ J. R. Woodhouse, ‘Fantasy, Alienation and the *Racconti* of Italo Calvino’, *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 6 (1970), 399-412, p. 399; Andrea Dini, *Il Premio Nazionale “Riccione” 1947 e Italo Calvino* (Cesena: Il Ponte Vecchio, 2007).

³²⁸ Cf. Calvino, *Sono nato*, cit., pp. 146-47, 548.

his career, that he immediately gained a favourable critical consensus around his books.³²⁹ In 1963 he claimed: ‘Se c’è uno scrittore (...) per cui tutto è stato enormemente facile, al quale i tempi sono sempre stati propizi, sono io.’³³⁰ Looking back at the reception of some of Calvino’s earlier books, this is certainly a far too one-dimensional reading of his critical fortune. Some important critics were very critical about Calvino’s publications.³³¹ This is true for *Il sentiero*, but also for *La giornata*, and even later books received considerable criticism, as we will see further on in this section.³³² It is probably no coincidence that critics who try to relaunch Calvino in more recent years do so by referring to his less immediately successful books, to *La giornata* instead of to *Se una notte* for example, since temporal failure can be a sign of election, whereas success is often coterminous with compromise with the times.³³³

Putting Calvino’s intentions aside for a moment, the negotiation of value and meaning between authors and critics necessarily follows canonical fault lines. In other words: Calvino could not provide for his own canonization, he needed critics to cooperate, to co-opt him for their own purposes. This is why critics who ‘accuse’ Calvino are actually, more or less indirectly, accusing their peers (hence the unusually strong reactions to publications such as Benedetti’s). In defending Calvino, critics are defending their literary theories that champion him, just as he in turn authorizes these theories.³³⁴

A good starting point to examine Calvino’s road to become a modern classic can be found in his ‘initiation’ in the select company of Einaudi’s public intellectuals, most notably of two of the most respected writers of the previous generation: Cesare Pavese and Elio Vittorini (both born in 1908). Calvino has been very active in delineating his relations to both, and both take on different positions

³²⁹ Italo Calvino, *Eremita a Parigi: pagine autobiografiche* (Milan: Mondadori, 1994), p. 250; Calvino, *Sono nato*, cit., p. 19.

³³⁰ Calvino, *Sono nato*, cit., p. 100.

³³¹ Cf. Emilio Cecchi, ‘Il visconte dimezzato’, in *Di giorno in giorno: note di letteratura italiana contemporanea: 1945-1954* (Milan: Garzanti, 1959), pp. 310-13; Asor Rosa, *Stile Calvino*, cit., p. 6.

³³² Dini, *Il Premio Nazionale*, cit.; Roberta Favia, ‘Il linguaggio del mondo senza parole: una proposta di lettura de *La giornata di uno scrutatore* di Italo Calvino’, *Critica letteraria*, 140 (2008), 557-79, pp. 564-65.

³³³ Cf. Moran, ‘The Reign of Hype’, cit., pp. 339-40.

³³⁴ Cf. François Provenzano, ‘La consécration par la théorie’, *CONTEXTES*, 7 (2010), <<http://contextes.revues.org/4629>> [accessed 8 October 2015]; Yves Bonnefoy, ‘Homage to Jorge Luis Borges’, *New Literary History: a Journal of Theory and Interpretation*, 21.1 (1989), 163-73, p. 164.

with respect to Calvino in the process, going from masters to colleagues that are in part criticized and surpassed. Just as with Ernest Hemingway, another avowed writerly model of his early years, Calvino keeps on refining his judgements over the years, continuing to write essays that serve as reappraisals of these writers' worth, and that become more and more ambiguous in their appreciation as Calvino acquires a growingly individual intellectual profile. As seen in section 1.2, Calvino creates a sort of detached proximity to these old models and over time manages to determine their reputation more than the other way around.³³⁵ At the beginning of his career, the support and 'closeness' of Pavese and Vittorini proves an important legitimation for Calvino's writing, which can also be seen from the fact that when Calvino is treated in academic volumes in the first two decades of his career, it is mostly together with one of these mentors or with both of them.³³⁶ In 1950, the risk of confounding Calvino's 'firma' with that of Pavese was still considerable: 'A leggere uno dei racconti di Italo Calvino [da *Ultimo viene il corvo*], senza guardare la firma, c'è il rischio di confondere il suo mondo con quello di Cesare Pavese'.³³⁷ Later, Calvino is often the one to pronounce a critical statement on Pavese or Vittorini: characteristic is the last word that is reserved to Calvino in the 1977 volume *La critica e Pavese*.³³⁸ Interestingly, the way in which Calvino puts a 'pietra sopra' Pavese ten years after the suicide of the Piemontese author, is very similar to the way he proceeds in the famous preface to his own *Sentiero*. Calvino sums Pavese up, as a man and as an author, in a 'style', a 'style' that – as we have seen in our discussion of the concept – unites personality and universality, and that turns Pavese into an example of a 'condizione sociale e epocale', a 'sapore tipico di quel tempo'.³³⁹

³³⁵ Castellucci, *Op. cit.*, p. 66; Cf. Masimo Bucciandini, *Op. cit.*, pp. 95-103.

³³⁶ Cf. Enzo Siciliano, *Prima della poesia* (Florence: Valecchi, 1965); Giovanna Finocchiaro Chimirri, *Letteratura come storiografia* (Catania: N. Giannotta, 1968); Claudio Varese, *Occasioni e valori della letteratura contemporanea* (Bologna: Cappelli, 1968); Andrea Bisicchia, *Aspetti del secondo Novecento: Pavese, Vittorini, Calvino* (Siracusa: Editrice Meridionale, 1973).

³³⁷ Giorgio Botta, cit. in: Andrea Dini, 'Calvino e le "illuminazioni" di Pavese', in *Pavese a San Francisco: incontro per la celebrazione del centerario della nascita: atti del Congresso 24-25 ottobre 2008*, ed. by Chris Concolino (Florence: Franco Cesati, 2011), pp. 127-37, p. 127.

³³⁸ Mauro Ponzi (ed.), *La critica e Pavese* (Bologna: Cappelli, 1977), pp. 208-16; Cf. Marziano Guglielminetti and Giuseppe Zaccaria (eds.), *Cesare Pavese: introduzione e guida allo studio dell'opera pavesiana: storia e antologia della critica* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1976); Raffaele Crovi, *Il lungo viaggio di Vittorini: una biografia critica* (Venice: Marsilio, 1998); Edoardo Esposito, *Elio Vittorini: scrittura e utopia* (Rome: Donzelli, 2011), pp. 133, 159.

³³⁹ Ponzi, *La critica e Pavese*, cit., p. 209; Cf. Bart van den Bossche, 'Italo Calvino lettore di Cesare Pavese', in *Onde di questo mare': Reconsidering Pavese*, ed. by Rossella Riccobono and Douglas Thompson (Market Harborough: Troubadour, 2002), pp. 121-34, pp. 122-25.

Calvino has thus been promoted (partially by himself) to ‘curatore testamentario’ of Cesare Pavese. Similarly, in a special issue on Elio Vittorini of the journal *Ponte* in 1973, Calvino lectures on ‘Viaggio, dialogo, utopia’ (as the title of his contribution reads) in the works of Elio Vittorini.³⁴⁰ A few years later, in a book about the function of intellectuals in Italian society, Massimo Romano dedicates the section ‘L’intellettuale dopo Vittorini: un vuoto da colmare’ to wise words of Calvino, who, in this way, symbolically fills the proposed gap.³⁴¹ Within the context of canon formations, one does not necessarily have to fault Calvino for this strategic positioning between (and, eventually, above) former masters. Paola Govoni however has shared her strong doubts on the matter, in stating that Calvino was performing a ‘cultural operation, carried out with his eyes wide open, to exclude women from his reconstruction of the education (...) It was necessary to place himself (...) in that tradition of Italian writers (mostly men), who had profoundly renovated Italian culture, starting from Pavese’.³⁴² In other words, Calvino was using (symbolic) power to safeguard a strong position for himself in intellectual circles. This important suspicion, and the suggestion that emanates from Govoni’s ‘eyes wide open’, especially with regard to gender issues, will receive more attention in section 4.3.

The 1960s are a crucial period in the carving out of Calvino’s critical reputation, as we will see as well in chapter 3. The writer himself is very much involved in the critical negotiations around his works, in part through what Paola Castellucci calls ‘riti di congedo’: ‘C’è una lunga fase del lavoro letterario e intellettuale di Calvino – quella che va grossomodo dal 1958 al 1970 – in cui lo scrittore compie una serie di lunghi riti di congedo’.³⁴³ The (initial) ‘closeness’ that translates into a similar vicinity in critical volumes is certainly not restricted to contemporaries such as Hemingway, Pavese and Vittorini. With the ‘riti di congedo’, Calvino creates ‘space’ for other writers in his personal canon. One might also say that he shifts from one canon to the other. When it comes to canonization, affiliation with established classics is vital and Calvino’s name has repeatedly and almost

³⁴⁰ Italo Calvino, ‘Viaggio, dialogo, utopia’, *Ponte: Rivista Mensile di Politica e Letteratura*, 29 (1973), 908-14.

³⁴¹ Massimo Romano, *Gli stregoni della fantacultura: la funzione dell’intellettuale nella letteratura italiana del dopoguerra (1945-1975)* (Turin: Paravia, 1977).

³⁴² Paola Govoni, ‘The Making of Italo Calvino: Women and Men in the “Two Cultures” Home Laboratory’, in *Writing About Lives in Science: (Auto)biography, Gender and Genre*, ed. by Paola Govoni and Zeldia Alice Franceschi (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2014), pp. 187-221.

³⁴³ Castellucci, *Op. cit.*, p. 90; Cf. Joseph Francese, ‘The Engaged Intellectual’, *cit.*, pp. 163-79.

indissolubly been bound to that of Ludovico Ariosto. It should be stressed here that it was none other than Pavese himself who suggested very early on an ‘ariostesque’ side to Calvino’s writing in his discussion of Calvino’s debut novel, a reading which was then as it were passed on to Vittorini and eventually ‘ratified’ by Calvino himself.³⁴⁴

Calvino’s readings of Ariosto are of undeniable importance and its influences can be fruitfully traced in his own fictions. However, the opposite is also true, namely that Ariosto is very often read through the privileged ‘lens’ of Calvino’s reading.³⁴⁵ This surpassing of the classic by the modern has a significant counterpart in the editorial history of Ariosto’s *Orlando furioso*, which was retold by Calvino in a very successful new edition (*L’Orlando furioso raccontato da Italo Calvino*).³⁴⁶ The volume went to several editions, in which the name Calvino comes more and more to the fore, and Ariosto slowly retreats, as Lucia Re points out: ‘Calvino tells the story so well, the editor seems to say, that we don’t need Ariosto.’ In this way, an ‘Ariosto who is a reader of Calvino’ is created, in a topsy-turvy logic of inverted authority, or successful usurpation of authority.³⁴⁷ Calvino’s subtle presence moves quite naturally from the editorial to the critical realm, in an analogous way to the cases described in the first chapter: ‘Calvino’s critical reflection on Ariosto constitutes a significant part of their encounter (...) but it has remained mostly unscrutinized, perhaps partly because Calvino himself downplayed it with characteristic *sprezzatura*.’³⁴⁸ The seemingly simple question ‘who is the author of *L’Orlando furioso raccontato da Italo Calvino*’ can have no straightforward answer and Calvino’s selection and literal framing of Ariosto’s work is both an editorial and

³⁴⁴ Cf. Roberto Bertoni, *Int’abrigu int’ubagu: discorso su alcuni aspetti dell’opera di Italo Calvino* (Turin: Tirrenia Stampatori, 1993), p. 14; Guido Almansi, ‘Intervista a Italo Calvino’, *Nuova corrente: Italo Calvino*, 2 (1987), 387-408, p. 394.

³⁴⁵ Cf. Wiley Feinstein, *Humility’s Deceit: Calvino Reading Ariosto Reading Calvino* (West Lafayette: Bordighera, 1995); Martin McLaughlin, “‘C’è un furto con scasso in ogni vera lettura’: Calvino’s Thefts from Ariosto.” *Parole Rubate: Rivista internazionale di studi sulla citazione*, 7 (2013), 111-35, pp. 127-32.

³⁴⁶ Italo Calvino, *Orlando furioso raccontato da Italo Calvino: con una scelta del poema* (Turin: Einaudi, 1970).

³⁴⁷ Lucia Re, ‘Ariosto and Calvino: The Adventures of a Reader’, in *Ariosto Today: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. by Donald Beecher, Massimo Ciavolella and Roberto Fedi (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), pp. 211-33, pp. 228, 214.

³⁴⁸ Re, ‘Ariosto and Calvino’, cit., p. 214.

a critical operation, the influence of which should not be underestimated. To attribute value as a critic is indeed also a way to 'autovalorizzare la propria figura'.³⁴⁹

At this point it can be enlightening to return to Calvino's affinity with Henry James for a moment and recall the parallels in prefatorial practices for their own works:

The decidedly problematic traditional readings of the Edition are James's wish: the prefaces present an idealized reading of the novels and tales they precede, modeled and authorized by James. They further construct an identity for the author based upon a well-wrought history of his authorship. This identity is more complex than the monolithic Master, but no less iconic.³⁵⁰

In Calvino's case, one can say that he presents as well a 'well-wrought history of his readership' (Calvino the reader and Calvino the author are virtually inseparable), which is certainly not monolithic, but very iconic in a double sense: it has the potential of functioning as an icon for Calvino as an author, and it is made up almost exclusively of icons, literary giants. These icons of Calvino's readership are easily transferred to and included in his authorial image which is, again, dialectically created together with critics. Calvino worked with critics, stimulating them when they were 'on the right track', adding to their analyses, adopting certain proposed critical views but always seemingly remaining in control.³⁵¹ It should be added that scholars who suspect or stress that Calvino is playing games with his critics tend to psychoanalyze him (to discover a territory where Calvino is not fully 'in control').³⁵² This active sculpting on Calvino's part creates a strong *impression* of coherence and continuity, regardless of Calvino's versatility as a writer. Ulrich Schulz-Buschhaus wrote in 1995: 'As a matter of fact, also for the literary critic and the literary historian it is fairly difficult to find poetic or thematic terms that are suitable to describe Calvino's work as a whole, or even to describe large phases uniformly.'³⁵³ For Buschhaus these terms are all potential 'pars pro toto', but none of them has a monopoly on Calvino's authorial image. Most critics do not seem to agree with Buschhaus, at least not *factually*, since phases of his work and even his work as a

³⁴⁹ Spinazzola, 'La valorizzazione letteraria', cit., pp. 206-7.

³⁵⁰ Pearson, 'The Art of Self-Creation', cit., p. 40.

³⁵¹ Cf. Luigi Malerba, in: VV.AA., *Italo Calvino: atti del convegno internazionale, Firenze*, cit., p. 406; McLaughlin, *Italo Calvino*, cit., p. 51; Vidal, 'Fabulous Calvino', cit., p. 8.

³⁵² Cf. for example the work of Benedetti, Francese (2008), Alessia Ricciardi and Tompkins.

³⁵³ Buschhaus, *Zwischen »resa« und »ostinazione«*, cit., p. 7 [Translation mine].

whole have been described rather repetitively in a uniform manner in Calvino criticism.

Calvino's essays and literary fiction are often read in symbiosis, with the one pole serving as the privileged passageway to come to an understanding of the other. In other words, a continuity between literary essays and essayistic fiction is supposed by most critics.³⁵⁴ This is tacitly confirmed by critics who read Calvino's fiction through the lens of his essays, without historicizing or problematizing the 'lens'. Calvino, so we read in Mario Barenghi's introduction to the volume of his *Saggi*: 'parla sempre da luoghi ben definiti, variamente eccentrici e marginali. È, soprattutto, un osservatore.'³⁵⁵ Such a statement moves readily from the varied and specific ('luoghi ben definiti') to the vague cliché of a Mr. Palomar ('osservatore'). This timeless quality is corroborated by the arrangement of the essays in alphabetical (instead of chronological) order, which dehistoricizes the whole and turns the volume into a sort of 'dizionario della letteratura secondo Calvino'.³⁵⁶ The danger of reading Calvino linearly (or, rather, circularly) through his own fictional and non-fictional categories, creating a self-sufficient critical tapestry of calvinian intertext, has been recognized early on by Giorgio Bertone:

Calvino è tanto precocemente incline a fornire, dentro e fuori dei suoi testi narrativi, elementi non marginali per definire la sua opera, almeno quanto è pronto ad appropriarsi delle definizioni dei suoi critici maggiori, a sposarle, specie per il lato che più gli torna a favore, e a «cercare di confermarle» nella pratica. Occorre allora uscire dal chiuso dei rimandi tautologici che l'autore ha innestato. Intanto: non fidarsi delle sue sistemazioni «a posteriori» quando suonano così suadenti e verificarle nella trama interna.³⁵⁷

Bertone's suggestion is certainly interesting and pertinent, but it needs some specification. The power of these 'definitions' that Calvino and critics share lies in the fact that they form a corpus of easily recognizable metaphors, that can be used and reused, spreading through critical circles. Furthermore, these metaphors not only describe Calvino, they also tie him poetically to other writers and critics who have adopted the same metaphors. In the first chapter the example of the eye was developed, but 'Italo Calvino' as a recognizable signature is bound up with other important and oft repeated characterizations and epithets, such as 'labyrinth',

³⁵⁴ Cf. Calvino, *Saggi*, cit., p. x.

³⁵⁵ Ivi, p. xxx.

³⁵⁶ Castellucci, *Op. cit.*, p. 183.

³⁵⁷ Bertone, *Italo Calvino*, cit., p. 92.

‘chessboard’, ‘crystal’ and ‘flame’ (the last constituting a pair of opposites that co-exist in an antinomical matter, which occurs very frequently in Calvino, providing a recurring thought structure that underlies many of Calvino’s works).³⁵⁸ Titles can function in a similar manner: a perfect example of this is *Le città invisibili*, a concept which cannot be named without referring to Calvino.

The attraction of these myriad ‘pars pro toto’ for critics can prove strong and is often even presented as the most legitimate way of describing Calvino’s texts: ‘The concept of imperfect model is easily superimposable on that of digressive plot (...) It also has the great advantage of coming from Calvino’s own imagery.’³⁵⁹ Other critics seem to resist such an approach, such as Luigi Montella when he claims, Bertone-like: ‘Bisogna stare attenti poi a non fidarsi ciecamente delle numerose tracce che lo scrittore dissemina per delineare in maniera netta i contorni dei suoi scritti.’ However, certain descriptions of Calvino that follow in the same volume can be said to be very Calvinian indeed, through clusters of concepts as ‘indeterminatezza’, ‘labirintica’, ‘cristallizzazione’, ‘catalogazione’, ‘groviglio infinito’ and ‘voragini’ within the space of two pages.³⁶⁰ Similarly, Franco Gallippi describes Calvino almost exclusively through calvinian metaphors: the artichoke, the onion, the seashell, the crystal/flame combination and several others.³⁶¹ Since Gallippi writes about style, the important connection between style, signature and iconic recognizability is thus tacitly confirmed.³⁶²

The point is not that these metaphors are inadequate to describe Calvino, because metaphors never capture an entire complex corpus of works. One could rather claim the opposite, namely that they are *too* adequate, they fit his work too well, as they are completely coherent with his own interpretive practice. What might be even more important is that they tend to petrify the web of intertextual relations that Calvino has woven as a frame around his authorial image. When JoAnn Cannon remarks that the chessboard is a Saussurian metaphor, this is as true as can be and it

³⁵⁸ Cf. Barengi, *Le linee e i margini*, cit., p. 63.

³⁵⁹ Santovetti, *Op. cit.*, p. 194.

³⁶⁰ Luigi Montella, *Italo Calvino: il percorso dei linguaggi* (Salerno: Edisud-Salerno, 1996), pp. 35, 67-68.

³⁶¹ Franco Gallippi, ‘Calvino and the ‘Nature’ of Style: an Interaction between Literature and Science’, *Rivista di Studi Italiani*, 21.2 (2003), 134-50.

³⁶² For a further discussion of the importance of metaphor in the critical spread of Calvino’s works, cf. section 2.3.

is easy to ‘consider the case closed’ as it were.³⁶³ For the labyrinth one can think (and practically all critics have thought) of Borges,³⁶⁴ the *École du regard* and the *Oulipo*.³⁶⁵ These are legitimate intertextual readings of Calvino’s metaphors, but they tend to dissolve differences, especially with time, when disseminated from article to article, from book to book, as well as from lecturer to student.

Calvino is a writer who uses iconic images in most of his books (the viscount is cloven, the baron in the trees, and therefore they are easily distinguishable, imaginable) and his works lend themselves ‘naturally’ to a reading in the context of images, metaphors or keywords. The calvinian mixture of image and imagination, detail and abstraction is a very suggestive one for readers and critics alike and has been described well by Franco Ricci: ‘In questo modo, quello che è discorsivo e quello che è figurativo si fondano per formare un blocco narrativo che si materializza al limite dell’immagine visibile e sulla soglia della parola scritta in un vero e proprio atto di intertestualità polisemica.’³⁶⁶ This ‘intertestualità polisemica’ proves to be a rare quality of Calvino’s ‘invisible’ cities and other ‘invisible’ icons, which stimulate readers and artists to creatively visualize them, to make them real by giving them a (mental or material) form and function outside Calvino’s fictional world.³⁶⁷

As we have seen in section 1.3, the *Lezioni* are the clearest example of this intersecting of keywords and metaphors. Furthermore, the case of the *Lezioni* indicates how easily Calvino’s imagery ‘catches on’ to become an interpretive key in cataloguing literature, in forging canons. In fact, the *Lezioni* are often straightforwardly classified as a ‘canone’.³⁶⁸ But not only do critics read the work as

³⁶³ JoAnn Cannon, *Italo Calvino*, cit., p. 87.

³⁶⁴ Calvino was member of the ‘comitato consultivo’ of a conference and volume on labyrinths that had in Borges its ‘presidente onorario’. Cf. Hermann Kern, *Labirinti: forme e interpretazioni: 5000 anni di presenza di un archetipo: manuale e filo conduttore* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1981).

³⁶⁵ The examples are far too many to name, but an interesting instance is the inclusion of a chapter on Calvino in Harold Bloom’s volume on *Labyrinths*, cf.: Aimable Twagilimana, ‘Italo Calvino’s If On a Winter’s Night a Traveler and the Labyrinth’, in *The Labyrinth*, ed. by Harald Bloom and Blake Hobby (New York, NY: Bloom’s Literary Criticism, 2009), pp. 81-92. Cf. also: Pierre Rosenstiehl, ‘Labirinto’, in *Enciclopedia. Vol. VIII* (Einaudi, Torino, 1979), pp. 3-30, p. 7.

³⁶⁶ Franco Ricci, ‘Immagini in posa, immagini in prosa: Calvino-Gnoli: un’arte a parte’, *Veltro: rivista della civiltà italiana*, 40.3-4 (1996), 157-61, p. 161.

³⁶⁷ Cf. Ellen Esrock, ‘A Proposal for Integrating Readerly Visuality into Literary Studies: Reflections on Italo Calvino’, *Word & Image: A Journal of Verbal/Visual Enquiry*, 9.2 (1993), 114-21; Stephen Benson, *Cycles of Influence: Fiction, Folktale, Theory* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2003), p. 99; Marco Caracciolo, ‘Naïve Physics and Cosmic Perspective-Taking in Dante’s *Commedia* and Calvino’s *Cosmicomiche*’, *MLN*, 130.1 (2015), 24-41, pp. 35-39.

³⁶⁸ Eugenio Scalfari, *Per l’alto mare aperto: la modernità e il pensiero danzante* (Turin: Einaudi, 2010), p. 276.

canon or testament in abstract terms, the *Lezioni* are used time and again as interpretive categories for works that stem from another period in Calvino's writing career. In a recent essay, for example, JoAnn Cannon reads Calvino's *Il barone rampante* and *La giornata di uno scrutatore* through the lens of his category of 'leggerezza', then calls 'esattezza' 'one of the valuable interpretive keys to his works', after which the analysis moves towards the image of the labyrinth, and the almost inevitable connections to Borges, Gadda and Robbe-Grillet. Then she takes a further step by stating that the *Lezioni* are 'literary values' on the basis of which one can read 'Dante, Ovid, Boccaccio, Flaubert, Borges, Cavalcanti, Kundera, Gadda, Galileo and countless other writers.'³⁶⁹ Here, in terms of canon, we have a clear revision of the usual terms and conditions: Calvino seems to have the authority to determine the profile of these writers, redrawing literary history with his categories.³⁷⁰ A concrete example of this is the influential pattern that Calvino successfully traced in Italian intellectual history and that revolves mainly around the couple Galileo and Leopardi. Of this proper new canonized poetics, Calvino himself naturally is the most important heir.³⁷¹ Jeremy Lonsdale also foregrounds 'leggerezza' in comparisons with other writers and praises Calvino for the fact that he 'applies the same dispassionate intelligence to his own work as to those given the status of "classics" by contemporary society.'³⁷² It is precisely this 'dispassionate intelligence', the alleged 'objectivity' with which Calvino treats his own works in one breath, as it were, with recognized classics that one should maybe be wary of.

'Anti-calvinists' have foregrounded a similar argument in the course of the last decades in the discussions about canon(s). Antonio Moresco, one of Calvino's harshest critics, laments for example that 'ogni artista su cui Calvino posa gli occhi

³⁶⁹ JoAnn Cannon, 'Calvino's essays', in *Approaches to Teaching the Works*, cit., pp. 31-36, pp. 32-34; Cf. Francesca Bernardini Napoletano, 'Leggerezza e molteplicità nel *Sentiero dei nidi di ragno*', *Rivista di Studi Italiani*, 21.2 (2003), 11-33.

³⁷⁰ Cf. Lipking, *Op. cit.*, pp. 138-69.

³⁷¹ Cf. apart from the already cited volumes of Antonello, Greco and Sandrini in section 1.4, Ladina Bezzola Lambert, *Imagining the Unimaginable: the Poetics of Early Modern Astronomy* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002); Gaspare Polizzi, 'La letteratura italiana dinanzi al cosmo: Calvino tra Galileo e Leopardi', *Lettere italiane*, 62.1 (2010), 63-107; Antonio Catalfamo, *I confini della letteratura: filosofia e scienza nell'opera letteraria: da Dante a Leopardi* (Chieti: Solfanelli, 2014), pp. 202-8, 212-13, 229; Fabio Camilletti and Paola Cori, *Ten Steps: Critical Enquiries on Leopardi* (Bern: Peter Lang AG, 2015), pp. 4-5.

³⁷² Jeremy Lonsdale, 'Calvino and "Leggerezza"', *Stanford Italian Review*, 10 (1991), 199-223, p. 199.

viene eviscerato, depotenziato, calvinizzato, ridotto alla sua misura.³⁷³ Note the reference (certainly not casual) to ‘gli occhi’ which cancel out the ‘viscere’, Calvino’s cool gaze that moulds classics to ‘misura’ (another telling choice of words), to become his mirror-image. This is certainly too severe on Calvino who (as pointed out above) still needs critics to confirm and solidly establish these ‘calvinized classics’. However, Moresco’s statement does contain a grain of truth if one considers the ‘legislative’ power of Calvino’s judgements. This cannot be read apart from the oft-repeated conviction that ‘Calvino, per così dire, è nato classico.’³⁷⁴ As a classic, Calvino can offer authoritative readings of the classics. The confirmation of these readings by literary critics and literary historians serves in turn to solidify Calvino’s status as an author. However, this process is not linear, nor free of controversy and competition, and this controversy in large part contributes to the reshaping of Calvino’s authorial image over time, as we will see in the next section.

³⁷³ Moresco, *Il vulcano*, cit., p. 16.

³⁷⁴ Romano Luperini, *La fine del postmoderno* (Naples: Guida, 1995), p. 74.

2.2 Calvino's reception in the Italian canon: obstacles, negotiations, avant-gardes and antagonists

Calvino has important characteristics of the classic, as discussed in the previous section. His frequent presence in anthologies and school curricula is only one of the many signs that point to this canonization. However, the danger is that this true statement becomes a truism, that one treats him as the author that was 'nato classico', majestically and calmly steering over a windless literary scene. Calvino's critical fortune has not always been steady and strong, uncontested and without alternatives. Massimo Bucchiantini points for example to the '60s as a moment in which Calvino met with significant critical resistance.³⁷⁵ The '60s were also the period of the alleged watershed in his career, of the peculiar work *Le cosmicomiche* (the vicissitudes of this book's critical fortune will be treated in more detail in chapter three). It is therefore meaningful that, in the heat of the critical negotiations about his more fantastic works, Calvino composes the above-mentioned preface to *Il sentiero*, in which he writes in an unappreciative manner about bestsellers, thus on this occasion taking up a position of a proponent of 'high literature'.³⁷⁶ However, his stance is (or develops to be) much more subtle than that, since he does not adopt a straightforward avant-gardist position and 'flirts' repeatedly (and logically) with editorial and economic standpoints.

Calvino's attitude with respect to the Italian avant-garde, and more specifically the *neoavanguardia* which became also known as the *gruppo 63*, is rarely scrutinized. Calvino's effective distancing from the *neoavanguardia* can be gathered from the relative absence of books and articles that exclusively address this topic. Whereas writers like Pasolini and Manganelli have been treated in volumes that outline their relationship with the *neoavanguardia*, Calvino so far has been relatively overlooked.³⁷⁷ Nevertheless, two of Calvino's most quoted essays, *Il mare dell'oggettività* of 1960 and *La sfida al labirinto* of 1962, were written in the context of lively debates and treat not only the *nouveau roman* but also the *neoavanguardia*.

³⁷⁵ Bucchiantini, *Op. cit.*, p. 107.

³⁷⁶ Cf. Gian Carlo Ferretti, *La letteratura del rifiuto e altri scritti sulla crisi e trasformazione dei ruoli intellettuali* (Milan: Mursia, 1982), p. 39.

³⁷⁷ Cf. Vincenzina Levato, *Lo sperimentalismo tra Pasolini e la neoavanguardia: 1955-1965* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2002); Florian Mussgnug, *The Eloquence of Ghosts: Giorgio Manganelli and the Afterlife of the Avant Garde* (Oxford; New York: Peter Lang, 2010). For an important and almost completely overlooked exception cf. Antonio Russi, *La narrativa italiana dal neosperimentalismo alla neoavanguardia (1950-1983)* (Rome: Lucarini, 1983), pp. 33-59.

Already then, they were quoted so often that their titles became proverbial.³⁷⁸ And already then, Renato Barilli confessed that

chi del breve ma assai impegnato intervento di Calvino sul ‘Menabò’ n. 2 conduce una lettura esclusivamente ‘formale’, ‘sintattica’ (...) volta a effettuare soltanto una verifica interna dei concetti esposti alla luce di un umanesimo generico e prescindendo completamente da un contesto storico, non potrà certo far a meno di consentire.³⁷⁹

But Barilli also contended that this ‘ragione acronica’ was the product of a ‘velleitarismo moralistico’.³⁸⁰ What is certain is that in this period Calvino follows the debate around the different avant-garde movements closely, and participates in it, especially through *Il menabò*, the journal on which Vittorini and he collaborated and which often hosted prominent avant-gardists such as Francesco Leonetti, Umberto Eco and Edoardo Sanguineti. The debate around the *neoavanguardia* centred mostly on the antagonistic journals of *Officina* and *Il Verri*, but *Il menabò* certainly played its part.³⁸¹

Calvino’s correspondence in those years attests to his interest in the literary experimentations of the different avant-garde movements, within Italy and outside. His correspondents include Fortini, Pasolini, Eco, Guglielmi, Manganelli and other important figures in the ongoing debates. He was present, without speaking, at the conference of the *Gruppo 63* in La Spezia in 1968, declaring in a letter to have found this congress both very interesting and occasionally perplexing.³⁸² His stance over the years has generally been one of mild reproach and detached interest towards the Italian forms of experimentalism, as always when it comes to literary movements before the *Oulipo*.³⁸³ Arguably, this has caused most critics to stress the differences between Calvino and the *neoavanguardia*, aprioristically dismissing the need for serious comparisons of the respective literary output. Calvino’s later membership of

³⁷⁸ Piero De Tommaso, *Narratori italiani contemporanei* (Rome: Edizioni dell’Ateneo, 1965), p. 216.

³⁷⁹ Renato Barilli, ‘Il mare dell’oggettività’, in *Gruppo 63*, ed. by Nanni Balestrini et al. (Milan: Bompiani, 2013), pp. 650-54, p. 650.

³⁸⁰ Barilli, ‘Il mare dell’oggettività’, cit., pp. 650, 654.

³⁸¹ Cf. Giuseppe Leonelli, *La critica letteraria in Italia (1945-1994)* (Milan: Garzanti, 1994), pp. 91-106; Éanna Ó Ceallacháin, ‘Polemical Performances: Pasolini, Fortini, Sanguineti, and the Literary-Ideological Debates of the 1950s’, *The Modern Language Review*, 108.2 (2013), 475-503, pp. 499-501.

³⁸² Calvino, *Lettere*, cit., pp. 927-28. Cf. Renato Barilli, *La neoavanguardia italiana: dalla nascita di “Verri” al fine di “Quindici”* (Bologna: Mulino, 1995), pp. 108-15; VV.AA., *Il Gruppo 63 quarant’anni dopo: Bologna 8-11 maggio 2003: atti del convegno* (Bologna: Pendragon, 2005), p. 146.

³⁸³ Short for ‘Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle’, founded by 1960 by French writers and mathematics.

the *Oulipo* in his years in Paris has caused names of the French pre-Oulipian avant-garde, most notably Alain Robbe-Grillet, to be more frequently suggested in Calvino criticism than their Italian counterparts.

The most influential contribution of Calvino to the discourse around the avant-garde is probably to be found in *La sfida al labirinto* and its aftermath, which consisted of an exchange of letters with Angelo Guglielmi. In *La sfida*, Calvino takes on the role of categorizer of literary movements, of a critic and literary historian one might say, instead of putting forward a clear programme of his own. His deconstruction of the different uses of the labyrinth is certainly interesting, considering the fact that the labyrinth would later become an important symbol for his own writing. However, the essay is more often than not read without reference to its context, or to the ensuing debate. Calvino's categorization was not acceptable to most neoavanguardists, who blamed Calvino both for simplifying the literary field of that moment, and for choosing to pick a battle that was a pseudo-battle, with a labyrinth that was no real labyrinth but a playful, innocuous reproduction that denied its basic principles.³⁸⁴ This accusation of a writer who is merely 'playing games' will return time and again in later attacks on Calvino.

In this particular instance, Guglielmi became the spokesman for these issues and thus Calvino's main addressee.³⁸⁵ However, the 'dispute' was published in the *Menabò*, and it was Calvino who decided the terms of the exchange, characteristically reserving the last word for himself. In the course of their exchange, Guglielmi and Calvino certainly did not move any closer to a resolution of their difference of opinion, but the tone unmistakably changed: Calvino's letters gradually become more mocking, with sneering remarks about the problems of the too 'professorial' stance of the neoavanguardists.³⁸⁶ A subtle but highly significant rhetorical change is to be found in the last letter: whereas until that point Calvino was officially writing directly to Guglielmi (even though the letters were made public in the *Menabò*), in the last letter he abandons the 'tu' and thus the fragile illusion of

³⁸⁴ Cf. VV.AA., *Il Gruppo 63 quarant'anni dopo*, cit., p. 29.

³⁸⁵ It should be noted, however, that only a few years earlier, in 1958 and 1960, Guglielmi had written in a very positive manner about the alternative approach to reality that Calvino offered in *Il barone rampante* and *Racconti*: Cf. Angelo Guglielmi, *Il romanzo e la realtà* (Milan: Bompiani, 2010), pp. 37-38, 122-27.

³⁸⁶ It should be noted here that Calvino certainly has not failed to take opportunities to question the too broad category of 'intellectuals' – implying that he was not (and could not be) part of that non-existent category – as well as to parody or criticize academics (such as with his infamous Uzzi-Tuzzi in *Se una notte*).

addressing specifically Guglielmi and he adopts a more 'objective', analytic third person.

This exchange with Guglielmi is characteristic of Calvino's treatment of the matter. He did not shy away from analysing the neoavanguardist movement, from stating his hesitations in fully appreciating it, but he did not let himself be caught in a more direct exchange that involved clarifying what he *did* appreciate and put into practice in his own writing.³⁸⁷ The explanation of his stance towards the 'avanguardia' in a letter of 1968 to Guido Fink offers a good example of this way of reasoning about the literary experimentations in Italy. Significantly, this letter was later included in *Mondo scritto e mondo non scritto*.³⁸⁸

Calvino thus leaves the *neoavanguardia* behind, so one could sum up the general critical consensus. He does so 'via' Manganelli and the *Oulipo* (seeking new poetics and new canons) and from that point on, he becomes 'Oulipian' or 'postmodern'.³⁸⁹ Calvino might want this to be the case, but the dialogue with the *neoavanguardia* has undoubtedly left its trace in his viewpoints. In other words, critics may take Calvino at his word, but in 'departing' from the *neoavanguardia* (his move towards Paris rather misleadingly makes this departure seem even more 'definitive'), he is also taking up an attitude and in the *Oulipo* he does not find the opposite of the *Gruppo '63* but rather a more palatable (international) alternative. This means that it is not simply a matter of turning one's back on a part of the past (even though this might seem to be the case), but more an ambiguous departure towards a group that shares important characteristics with the former.³⁹⁰

In Paris, Calvino writes some of his best-known books: *Il castello dei destini incrociati*, *Le città invisibili* and *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore*. By the time of the last book, published in 1979, Calvino's reputation as one of the most important contemporary (Italian) writers is quite firmly established. His book famously toys with the reputation of its author, thus affirming this status. However, Calvino also underlines expectations that the readers have, based on the name 'Italo Calvino' that

³⁸⁷ Cf. Calvino, *Sono nato*, cit., pp. 107, 125.

³⁸⁸ Calvino, *Mondo scritto e mondo non scritto* (Milan: Mondadori, 2002), pp. 56-59.

³⁸⁹ Cf. Raffaele Donnarumma, 'Calvino verso il postmoderno: dalla «sfida al labirinto» alla «memoria del mondo»', *Allegoria*, XIV.40-41 (2002), 80-109; Matteo Di Gesù, *Palinsesti del moderno: canoni, generi, forme nella postmodernità letteraria* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2005), p. 77; Marco Belpoliti, 'Ping pong Calvino-Manganelli, Manganelli-Calvino', in *Le foglie messaggere: scritti in onore di Giorgio Manganelli*, ed. by Viola Papetti (Rome: Editori riuniti, 2000), pp. 92-113, p. 93.

³⁹⁰ Cf. Guido Bonsaver, 'Il menabò, Calvino and the "avanguardie": Some Observations on the Literary Debate of the Sixties', *Italian Studies*, 50 (1995), 86-96, p. 95.

appears on the cover. The nature of these expectations puts certain constraints on the readings of the book, which needs to be read and ‘explained’ from an already established critical consensus. This is why a sort of critical embarrassment ensued when a book that explicitly addresses (and caters to?) the reader proved itself to be a proper bestseller. A ‘high’ and ‘sophisticated’ product of an esteemed writer conquered the book market in an almost unprecedented manner, becoming a sort of ‘book of the year’.³⁹¹

Partly because of his editorial work and experience, Calvino’s perspective on the matter was not that of a conventional romantic writer. The discussion in 1974 around Elsa Morante’s highly successful *La storia* formed the most important precedent to *Se una notte*’s success and already then Calvino had voiced his disagreement with the many critics that basically ‘reproached’ Morante for her success.³⁹² The general contention was that a book that sold so many copies did not belong to high literature.³⁹³ Interestingly, Morante’s *La storia* was also the ‘summer book’ of 1974, published as it was in the summer months. Similarly, *Se una notte* (which Calvino already finished writing in January) is one of the few books of Calvino that were published at the beginning of summer, on 2 June to be precise.³⁹⁴ In *Se una notte*, Calvino addresses the editorial context in which every publication is embedded, as well as engaging with literary theories that involve recognition of the reader, such as reader response theory and Barthes’ *jouissance* and ‘pleasure of the text’.³⁹⁵ He consciously creates a book that is difficult and readable at the same time, as the publicity surrounding the publication of the book stressed time and again.³⁹⁶

³⁹¹ Alberto Cadioli, *La narrativa consumata* (Pesaro: Transeuropea, 1987), p. 10; Cf. Enrico Deaglio, *Patria 1978-2010* (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 2010), pp. 75-76.

³⁹² Italo Calvino, ‘Allora Hugo disse alla Morante..’, *L’Espresso*, 1 September 1974, 37-38.

³⁹³ Cf. Guglielmi, *Il romanzo e la realtà*, cit., pp. 184-92; Hanna Serkowska, ‘About One of the Most Disputed Literary Cases of the Seventies: Elsa Morante’s *La Storia*’, in *The Value of Literature in and After the Seventies: the Case of Italy and Portugal*, ed. by Monica Jansen and Paola Jordão (Utrecht: Igitur, 2006), pp. 372-86, p. 374.

³⁹⁴ The only other books that Calvino published in June are *Gli amori difficili* (20-6-1970), the important 1964 edition of *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* (20-6-1964) and *Il barone rampante* (4-6-1957). Cf. McLaughlin, *Italo Calvino*, cit., p. 172; Cf. Fofi, *Strade maestre*, cit., p.168.

³⁹⁵ Cf. Silvio Gaggi, *From Text to Hypertext: Decentering the Subject in Fiction, Film, the Visual Arts, and Electronic Media* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), pp. 53-55.

³⁹⁶ Cadioli, *La narrativa consumata*, cit., p. 105; Cases, ‘Ricordo di Calvino’, in idem, *Patrie lettere* (Turin: Einaudi, 1987), pp. 172-76, p. 172; Ferretti, *Il best seller all’italiana*, cit., p. 72.

Calvino, and a year later Umberto Eco with *Il nome della rosa*, inaugurated a new critical category, the ‘best seller di qualità’.³⁹⁷ This term was coined in literary criticism in Italy to respond to publications like Eco’s, to writers that profiled themselves wilfully as managers responding to a ‘strategia di mercato che lo scrittore-ingegnere sa far propria e sa far interagire con la strategia testuale all’interno della scrittura stessa’.³⁹⁸ A new writerly profile developed, acknowledging the fact that ‘gli autori di bestsellers non si improvvisano: è necessaria una massiccia dose di professionalità e di esperienza (...) non è un’artista romantico (...) è imprenditore di se stesso. Lavora, da libero professionista, all’interno dell’industria editoriale, attento ad ogni minima variazione di mercato, in perfetta armonia con l’editore.’³⁹⁹ The quote is from Carlo Bordini, who, in an interesting omission when viewed in the context of canonical divisions between types of literature, does not mention Calvino even once. Calvino himself however famously declared to always have his readers in mind, scorning Angelo Guglielmi for stating that he did so ‘unconsciously’.⁴⁰⁰ Gian Carlo Ferretti, in his *Best-seller all’italiana* of 1983, therefore concludes that *Se una notte* constitutes a ‘mirabile compromesso di Calvino’ through which he succeeds in ‘elevare e rinnovare notevolmente il romanzo italiano di consumo (...) ampliando l’area dei suoi personali lettori come mai nel passato; mentre l’intera operazione viene impostata senza ipocrisie su un rapporto coerente e in parte dichiarato, tra scrittore e obiettivi di mercato’.⁴⁰¹ Ferretti presents *Se una notte* (albeit in positive terms) as a carefully planned and marketed, strategic book, aimed to a certain extent at a large readership. Calvino was not happy with Ferretti’s book and refutes it stating that his was ‘un libro scritto per dei motivi letterari ed espressivi (...) non c’è dietro una manovra da parte dello scrittore o addirittura editoriale.’⁴⁰² Four years after the publication of *Se una notte*, on the verge of the publication of *Palomar*, Calvino seems to have changed his mind on the matter. The quote is remarkable, coming from a writer who consciously discusses many aspects of the editorial and commercial aspect of books within *Se una notte*

³⁹⁷ Cf. Umberto Eco, *Sulla letteratura* (Milan: Bompiani, 2002), pp. 231-34.

³⁹⁸ Ferretti, *La fortuna letteraria*, cit., pp. 28-31.

³⁹⁹ Carlo Bordini, *Il romanzo di consumo: editoria e letteratura di massa* (Naples: Liguori, 1993), p. 20.

⁴⁰⁰ Italo Calvino, *Romanzi e racconti: vol. 2*, cit., pp. 1388-97.

⁴⁰¹ Ferretti, *Il best seller all’italiana*, cit., pp. 83-84.

⁴⁰² Calvino, *Sono nato*, cit., p. 530.

itself, and who some years before had acted offended by intimations that he was not conscious of the possible effects of his book.

Editorial reality and critical reality do not necessarily develop along parallel, synchronic lines and in the case of Calvino, just as with modernist writers before, the idea of him as a ‘scrittore-ingegnere’ has been accepted fairly late.⁴⁰³ However, in a pejorative sense, the accusations of Calvino being more ‘ingegnere’ of his own authorial destiny than a writer or artist driven by ‘pure’ motives has recurred fairly constantly, both before and after his death, invariably as an (implicit) downplaying of the intrinsic quality of his writing. Remarkable in this respect is the consistency of certain complaints that are uttered about Calvino. As Massimo Bucciantini states: ‘Quando si ha a che fare con Calvino, il rischio che si corre più di frequente è quello di restare imprigionati dentro Calvino. Felicamente imprigionati, s’intende.’⁴⁰⁴ Bucciantini likes this imprisonment, but many lament it. Calvino himself writes to Leonardo Sciascia in 1964, somewhat reproaching Sciascia for his excess of control: ‘Ma possibile che questo accidente di uomo [Sciascia] sia sempre così controllato e cosciente e funzionale nella sua missione di moralista civile, possibile che mai salti fuori lui in persona col suo dèmone, il suo momento lirico e privato in contrapposizione a quello pubblico e storico, il suo “mito”, la sua “follia”?’⁴⁰⁵ Exactly this reproach will be voiced over the years against Calvino and the critics that applaud him: Calvino is unproblematic, classic because he is ‘easy’ and linear, never erupting to become troubled or willingly imperfect or inconsistent.⁴⁰⁶

Contrary to the idea that Calvino was ‘born a classic’, he has had many opponents during his writing career and after. These opponents show a remarkable consistency of opinion, and the voice of those who have critically ‘dismantled’ Calvino in the last decades is often easily retraced to earlier trumpeted tunes of discordance. Since it is not possible to extensively treat all of Calvino’s opponents one by one within the framework of this thesis, several key themes in anti-Calvinian discourses will be singled out here, instances when dissonants have raised their

⁴⁰³ Cf. Luigi Marfè, ‘Per chi si scrive? Autore, lettore e mercato nei saggi di Italo Calvino’, in *Autori, lettori e mercato nella modernità letteraria*, ed. by Ilaria Crotti et al. (Pisa: ETS, 2011), pp. 331-38.

⁴⁰⁴ Bucciantini, *Op. cit.*, p. 3.

⁴⁰⁵ Italo Calvino, ‘Lettere di Italo Calvino a Leonardo Sciascia’, *Forum Italicum*, 15.1 (1981), 62-72, p. 66.

⁴⁰⁶ Cf. section 4.1 on style and *La giornata d’uno scrutatore*.

voices equally high, or in some instances even higher, more eloquently or simply more loudly, than the ‘calvinists’.

An important moment that has been mentioned several times in articles takes place a couple of years after the death of the Ligurian ‘legislator’: the 1990 debate in the journal *Wimbledon*, which pitted opponents and calvinists against each other in a reappraisal of Calvino’s legacy, bringing together several of the most longstanding ‘anti-calvinists’. It should be specified here that those who knew Calvino, such as Franco Fortini, are rarely straightforward ‘anti-calvinists’, as they have been in more or less constant, respectful dialogue with the writer himself. Among the main points of convergence within the group of the ‘anti-calvinists’ is the agreement that ‘the last Calvino (...) is greatly inferior to the first and middle Calvino’.⁴⁰⁷ This is a judgement that implicitly recognizes the watershed of 1964, and that is often repeated in one way or another: liking the ‘postmodern Calvino’ or ‘Oulipian Calvino’ seems to almost automatically imply disliking the Calvino of *La speculazione edilizia* (to name just an example) and vice versa. As Franco Fortini points out: ‘per ragioni complesse di ideologia generale e visione politica c’è una tendenza letteraria che rifiuta o sottovaluta la prima metà della produzione di Calvino (...) Altri tendono invece ad esaltare il Calvino precedente, quello dei grandi racconti realistici e fantastici.’⁴⁰⁸

However, interestingly, the attacks that received the most attention, that echoed through the ranks of literary critics, are more often than not directed towards the ‘phenomenon’ Calvino, which includes Calvino criticism, and not so much towards the *writer* Calvino. In many cases the Ligurian writer seems to embody the monolithic canon *in person*, that which has to be challenged to make room for something else. As Mario Barenghi writes in 2007: ‘a Calvino è stato eretto un monumento: tant’è che oggi (...) è diventato il bersaglio polemico preferito, o almeno il preferito riferimento contrastivo, da tutti quanti lamentano (...) l’insufficiente considerazione per qualcun altro.’⁴⁰⁹ In other words, these pseudo-attacks do not treat Calvino himself extensively, but often bring another writer to the fore (from Gadda to Volponi, from Pasolini to Manganelli) who presumably lives ‘in the shadow’ of

⁴⁰⁷ Anna Botta, ‘Calvino and the Oulipo: an Italian Ghost in the Combinatory Machine?’, *MLN*, 112.1 (1997), 81-89, p. 81.

⁴⁰⁸ Cit. in: Puletti, *Op. cit.*, p. 3.

⁴⁰⁹ Barenghi, *Italo Calvino*, cit., p. 7.

the calvinian omnipresence. Conventionally, it is the 'last Calvino' that is attacked, not the Calvino of *Il sentiero*. Especially Palomar 'indipendente dal suo autore è venuto a simbolizzare l'ultimo Novecento postmoderno'.⁴¹⁰

Calvino, thus, seems to have become an 'idea di letteratura per un'intera generazione di critici'.⁴¹¹ These ideas are generally accepted now by Calvino critics, but they do not originate with Mario Barengi or Raffaele Donnarumma: it is the 'anti-calvinists' that have voiced these theories time and again and turned them into 'common knowledge'. Antonio Moresco has been one of the most explicit, but also among the most neglected and spurned of Calvino's opponents. At the same time, he has arguably been one of the most efficient critics of Calvino because of his clear tone of irreconcilability that presupposes and proposes literary 'parties'. His claim that 'un blocco intellettuale-editoriale-commerciale continua a proporre [Calvino] come modello unico e insuperabile e terminale, mentre un altro lo attacca con motivazioni altrettanto inaccettabili', neatly separates the arguments of the different participants in debates around Calvino, as well as pointing to a profound unity of intellectual and commercial interest.⁴¹² More recently, Moresco goes as far as to claim that 'Calvino ha dettato legge per 20 anni, nella letteratura e nell'editoria'.⁴¹³ The function of Calvino as monolith, as cultural tyrant, is specifically clear here, and ironically Moresco in this way does what he has scolded critics for in his earlier volume: 'lo epocalizzano'.⁴¹⁴ Andrea Rondini has stressed this aspect of Moresco's rhetorics as well: '«Figura generalizzabile» (...) il Calvino di Moresco (...) appare come un emblema, un'icona che incarna e riassume, estremizzandola in versione moderna, i mali endemici della tradizione letteraria italiana: il culto delle belle lettere, la pagina calligrafica, il gusto raffinato e cerebrale, la celebrazione auratica del verbo'.⁴¹⁵

This is not to say that there is no truth whatsoever in what Moresco is claiming. Again, he is certainly not the first to have made similar claims. Fortini lamented before, in the abovementioned issue of *Wimbledon* in 1990, that: 'È

⁴¹⁰ Jansen, *Op. cit.*, p. 280.

⁴¹¹ Donnarumma, *Da lontano*, cit., p. 7.

⁴¹² Moresco, *Il vulcano*, cit., pp. 19-20.

⁴¹³ Antonio Moresco, *Lettere a nessuno* (Turin: Einaudi, 2008), p. 345.

⁴¹⁴ Moresco, *Il vulcano*, cit., p. 21.

⁴¹⁵ Andrea Rondini, 'Italo Calvino nel nuovo millennio', in *Letteratura e oltre: studi in onore di Giorgio Baroni*, ed. by Paola Ponti (Pisa: Fabrizio Serra, 2012), pp. 635-39.

difficilissimo giudicare Calvino, soprattutto per colpa dei suoi ammiratori (...) Non si riesce a isolare l'opera dai miti e dai forti interessi editoriali che le sono legati.⁴¹⁶ What Moresco and Fortini describe is Calvino's role as a sort of exemplary figure for criticism, close to a medieval 'auctor' who is the incarnation of a quality, known for his 'sententiae' (general pearls of philosophical wisdom in concise form).⁴¹⁷ Not so much Calvino as a writer, but Calvino as an icon, a shrine for critics, seems to be the target: 'E amo persino pensare che lui stesso (...) si incazzerebbe con voi, che credete di difenderlo, in questo modo, trasformandolo in un'icona commerciale e devozionale e in un monumento.'⁴¹⁸ This perceived pure functionality of Calvino has become more and more puzzling for younger critics who are the heirs to that monumentalization, as they look with bemused detachment at the outlined statue for Calvino. There is an aspect of the celebrity about this, who casts her- or himself in a role that meets the expectations of the public. Paola Govoni has evidenced this type of relation towards the figure of Calvino when she speaks in an article of her hesitation to contribute to the 'storiografia delle parole vuote'.⁴¹⁹ There is definitely a feeling among many 'post-2000' commentators that Calvino's heirs and bad imitators are mostly to blame for a 'Calvinian' influence on the Italian literary scene that is considered gratuitous or even disastrous.⁴²⁰ One could argue, however, that in his role as editor Calvino was implicated in this simplification of his own authorial image and sometimes this complaint can be distilled from critical interpretations of his books, such as when Guido Almansi writes that there are two versions of the *Cavaliere inesistente*: the 'real', very complex and intriguing book, and the far too simplified and binarized summary of its contents by the author.⁴²¹

The reappraisals of Calvino's legacy in 2015, 30 years after Calvino's death, such as the collection of articles that were published for several months on

⁴¹⁶ Franco Fortini in: *Wimbledon: la gente che legge*, 1.4 (1990), 2.

⁴¹⁷ Cf. Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature*, cit., pp. 57-59.

⁴¹⁸ Moresco, *Il vulcano*, cit., p. 466; Cf. Fofi, *Op. cit.*, pp. 174, 177 Claudio Giunta similarly writes: 'È chiaro che Calvino non ha colpe. Colpevoli sono gli zelanti sacerdoti del mito'. Giunta, 'Ancora sulle *Lezioni americane*', cit., p. 10; Cf. also Antonio Scurati, 'La leggerezza di Calvino vent'anni dopo', in *Gli anni che non stiamo vivendo: il tempo della cronaca* (Milan: Bompiani, 2010), pp. 287-290, 288.

⁴¹⁹ Paola Govoni, 'La casa laboratorio dei Calvino Mameli tra scienza, arte e letteratura', *Belfagor*, XVII.5 (2012), 545-67, p. 547.

⁴²⁰ Cf. Domenico Calcaterra, *Il secondo Calvino: un discorso sul metodo* (Milan: Mimesis, 2014), p. 9; Giulio Ferroni [et al.], *Sul banco dei cattivi: a proposito di Baricco e altri scrittori alla moda* (Rome: Donzelli, 2006), pp. 24, 30-31; Nicola Merola, *Novecento in piccolo: saggi di letteratura contemporanea* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2000), p. 63.

⁴²¹ Guido Almansi, 'Il mondo binario di Italo Calvino', *Paragone*, 258 (1971), 95-110, pp. 99-100.

Doppiozero, testify to this generational abyss, to the way that iconization makes for sterilization. Another example is the debate that ensued after an article of Romano Luperini in *L'unità*, in which he declared the lack of proper 'old-fashioned' intellectuals: the names of Calvino and Pasolini were integral to that debate, which saw many propose new canons along the lines of new intellectual profiles and involved many of the names that we encounter in this section, such as those of Carla Benedetti and Antonio Moresco.⁴²² Visibility, success and the importance of the (new) media are continuously recycled topics in the contributions of many writers and critics, but not once in the debate is this compared to the situation in Calvino's and Pasolini's time. Hence, the debate becomes as bipolar as it is onedimensional and Calvino functions merely as a fixed point of departure.⁴²³ Pierpaolo Antonello's appropriately titled book *Dimenticare Pasolini* responds more accurately to this changing intellectual landscape by taking both the 'before' and the 'now' into account. Arguably, the title could have equally been *Dimenticare Calvino*, were it not for the subtitle which mentions 'impegno', a term that (in Italy at least) currently is much more associated with Pasolini than with Calvino (something which Antonello in fact foregrounds).⁴²⁴

Calvino reaches new generations as much through his critical image as through his books. Challenging Calvino has more and more come to mean a challenge to an idea of literature, to the way of conceiving the purpose of literature which (again, for the sake of the argument) is considered as unanimous, generational, hegemonic. The clear words with which Filippo La Porta refuses a certain type of contemporary literature that can easily be traced back to Calvino (even though La Porta questions more strongly the bad imitation of Calvino than Calvino himself) speak volumes: 'Meno letteratura come alibi e decorazione, come consumo più o meno chic e status symbol, come spettacolo che nobilita se stesso e i suoi fruitori,

⁴²² The 'sense of void in Italian and world literature since his death', as Martin McLaughlin puts it, is now and then voiced by critics. Cf. McLaughlin, *Italo Calvino*, cit., p. 165; Fofi, *Op. cit.*, p. 172; Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo, 'Il buio dopo Calvino', cit.

⁴²³ Franco Marchese (ed.), 'Intellettuali, letteratura e potere, oggi', *Quaderni di allegoria*, 6 (2005); Cf. Alberto Asor Rosa, *Il grande silenzio: intervista sugli intellettuali* (Rome; Bari: Laterza, 2009), pp. 84, 101; Filippo La Porta and Giuseppe Leonelli, *Dizionario della critica militante: letteratura e mondo contemporaneo* (Milan: Bompiani, 2007), p. 119; Andrea Cortellessa, 'Scritture-reagente: di alcuni autori-critici contemporanei (Antonella Anedda, Vitaniello Bonito, Tommaso Ottonieri)', in *La critica dopo la crisi: atti del Convegno di Arcavacata, 11-13 novembre 1999*, ed. by Margaritha Ganeri and Nicola Merola (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2002), pp. 41-83, p. 48.

⁴²⁴ Pierpaolo Antonello, *Dimenticare Pasolini: intellettuali e impegno nell'Italia contemporanea* (Milan: Mimesis, 2012), pp. 21, 97.

come sostituto cartaceo della realtà e illusione che tutto sia manipolabile con le parole, come elegante addomesticamento di tutto ciò che è sgradevole'.⁴²⁵ The idea of 'mere' elegant, self-sufficient words that describe no existing reality but instead manipulate it out of its recognizability, 'domesticating' reality and its darker sides, reads like a 'legenda' of Calvino criticism over the years. The same intolerance for Calvino's perceived excess of elegance can be traced in some more recent responses to the *Lezioni americane*. Whereas many critics are convinced that 'il ragionamento di Calvino non ammette, nella sua limpida scorrevolezza, fraintendimenti; né, tanto meno, maliziosi equivoci interpretativi',⁴²⁶ opponents have tried to deconstruct the text as superficial, fundamentally imprecise and even ethically unsound.⁴²⁷

All of these aspects have come to the fore most strikingly in the debate that ensued after the publication of Carla Benedetti's *Pasolini contro Calvino* of 1998, a debate that has fizzled in and out of existence ever since, becoming a clear point of reference and strongly shaping factions in the literary field. The dichotomy that Benedetti presents in her title has come to be an inevitable choice: when it comes to Calvino and Pasolini, it is very much an 'either/or' question in literary criticism. The Calvino-Pasolini distinction has become so much of a cliché that it tends to evoke irritation, to be shunned or to provoke a 'secret third option', whether it be Gadda or Sciascia, Morante or Ortese. At the same time, the heated debate has been very productive in affirming the profiles of the two writers, who seem to be caught in eternal opposition, fixed in a constellation in which they can move only when keeping their respective distances. As such, the Calvino-Pasolini contrast serves to affirm a more general *distinction* that Bourdieu underlines with respect to the literary field: 'the position-takings on art and literature (...) are organized around pairs of oppositions, often inherited from past polemics, and conceived as insurmountable antinomies, absolute alternatives, in terms of all or nothing, and while these structure thought, they also imprison it in a series of false dilemmas.'⁴²⁸ Since both authors are turned into opposite ideas, into symbols of a way of dealing with life and

⁴²⁵ Back cover of Filippo La Porta, *Meno letteratura, per favore* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2010); Cf. Filippo La Porta, 'Calvino e la giovane narrativa italiana', in *I luoghi di Calvino*, cit., pp. 145-56.

⁴²⁶ Mazzaella, *La grande rete*, cit., p. 23.

⁴²⁷ Cf. Cesare De Marchi, *Romanzi: leggerli, scriverli* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2007), pp. 75, 85; Claudio Giunta, 'Le «Lezioni americane» di Calvino 25 anni dopo: una pietra sopra?', *Belfagor*, 65.6 (2010), 649-66; Ricciardi, *After La Dolce Vita*, cit.;

⁴²⁸ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), p. 193.

literature, the role they play in that opposition tends to overshadow the actual content or development of their works.⁴²⁹ Robert Gordon has pointed out the canonical background of the debate, or, put differently, the canonical issues that are implicitly present in poetical oppositions: ‘Canons are formed on the basis of myths, models and figures, and of the penetration of these within the institutions that disseminate literary culture, rather than on the basis of aesthetics or literary value *per se*. Names in canons are always emblems and symptoms.’⁴³⁰ We can evince this abstract statement of Gordon in a concrete manner in the reappraisal of the Calvino-Pasolini dichotomy by Raffaele Manica:

Oggi mi sembra che Pasolini e Calvino si escludano soltanto in una prospettiva ideologica. La prospettiva letteraria li include entrambi: possono essere zone di avventura per lettori a caccia del senso del secolo in Italia. Calvino era la tentazione dell’ordine, un oroscopo euclideo della realtà. Pasolini tutto il contrario: le sue geometrie erano sotterranee e spezzate: sotto il caos, e coperte di belle bandiere.⁴³¹

Calvino is order, Pasolini chaos. Seen in this light, it is very significant that the discussion after Benedetti’s book regarded Calvino mostly as ‘autore di Palomar’.⁴³² Calvino is thus reduced to a very specific ‘fragment of Calvino’, to his testament, just as the *Scritti corsari* are occasionally pitted against *Palomar* as a different type of ‘testament’.⁴³³ When Moresco entitles his volume *Il vulcano: scritti critici e corsari*, it is thus all too clear under the aegis of which writer he attacks the monumentalized Calvino. However, in the final analysis, even the ‘itinerario calviniano per via negativa, le sue negazioni’ that is studied more and more, in as much as it is based on an idea of what the ‘real Calvino’ is, on a concept that what he excludes really remains foreign to him, means a reconfirmation of the clear image laid down over the years in Calvino criticism.⁴³⁴

But a more vital imbalance has been pointed out in the debate revolving around Calvino and Pasolini. Robert Gordon summarizes this when taking up a statement of Giuseppe Bonura, who argued that Benedetti’s comparison is unequal:

⁴²⁹ Jennifer Mackenzie, ‘«Che l’antico valore nelli italici cor non è ancor morto»: Carla Benedetti’s challenge’, *California Italian Studies*, 2.1 (2011); Cf. La Porta and Leonelli, *Dizionario della critica militante*, cit., p. 36.

⁴³⁰ Robert Gordon, ‘Pasolini contro Calvino: Culture, the Canon and the Millennium’, *Modern Italy*, 3.1 (1998), 870-99, p. 896.

⁴³¹ Raffaele Manica, *Exit Novecento: una raccolta di saggi* (Rome: A. Gaffi, 2007), p. 71.

⁴³² Jansen, *Il dibattito sul postmoderno*, cit., p. 270.

⁴³³ Manica, *Exit Novecento*, cit., p. 70.

⁴³⁴ Barengi, *Italo Calvino*, cit., p. 27.

‘she [Benedetti] sets man against work; or Pasolini the public moralist (...) against Calvino’s body of work which contains a necessarily mediated and intellectually articulated response to the world.’⁴³⁵ The formulation is revealing here: Calvino’s *body of work*, against Pasolini as a man. Calvino’s books become his body, his person, whereas in Pasolini’s case the books are made of the flesh of the man himself.⁴³⁶ The idea (or rhetorical concept) of Calvino as an ‘occhio’ and Pasolini as a ‘body’ has been frequently repeated over the years.⁴³⁷ Beneath the surface of this distinction lies a whole range of preconceived ideas around ‘occhio’ and ‘corpo’ and their respective relation to literature: a writer who is an ‘occhio’ develops a different form of engagement than a writer who is completely contained within his writing, ‘present’ in ‘flesh and bones’ as his ‘corporeal self’. ‘Occhio’ tends to be a perfect stylist whereas ‘corpo’ is first and foremost about content. ‘Occhio’ is fundamentally detached, ‘corpo’ could never be.⁴³⁸ This is made explicit in Benedetti’s division between the ‘autore immagine’ (Calvino) and the ‘autore in carne ed ossa’ (Pasolini).⁴³⁹ The distinction, however, already laid dormant in Italian criticism for a long time, as can be seen from the fact that Asor Rosa already in 1958 talks about the contrast between a Calvino ‘oggettivo e neo-illuministico’ and a Pasolini who ‘inserisce tutto il suo dramma personale.’⁴⁴⁰

The current academic context has even more strongly accentuated the difference between ‘eye’ and ‘body’. The sheer amount of the term ‘body’ in the titles of academic publications in Postcolonial, Queer and Gender Studies shows the strong foregrounding of the body which has taken place in the last decades. The body becomes pivotal in emancipational, anti-canon discourses and is strongly politicized, representing the ‘language’ of the repressed, the marginalized and the neglected, whereas the eye (or even more so, the *gaze*) tends to be of the dominant, the

⁴³⁵ Gordon, ‘Pasolini contro Calvino’, cit., p. 893.

⁴³⁶ Cf. Fabrizio Scrivano, *Calvino e i corpi: il peso dell’immateriale* (Perugia: Morlacchi, 2008), p. 7.

⁴³⁷ Rondini, ‘Italo Calvino nel nuovo millennio’, cit., p. 636.

⁴³⁸ Cf. Macé, ‘L’assertion ou les formes’, cit., pp. 61, 69; Deborah Amberson, ‘From Philology to Piracy: Pier Paolo Pasolini’s Passionate *Impegno* of Self and Style’, in *Creative Interventions*, cit., pp. 92-114, p. 111; Stefano Casi, ‘Pasolini, il corpo intellettuale’, in *L’eredità di Pier Paolo Pasolini*, ed. by Alessandro Guidi and Pierluigi Sasseti (Milan: Mimesis, 2009), pp. 39-48; Attilio Motta, ‘Lo schermo del corpo: (Auto)biografismo e post-democrazia’, in *Postmodern Impegno: Ethics and Commitment in Contemporary Italian Culture*, ed. by Pierpaolo Antonello and Florian Mussgnug (Oxford; New York: Peter Lang, 2009), pp. 147-160; Silvio Perrella, *Adii, fischi nel buio, cenni* (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 2016), pp. 56-57.

⁴³⁹ Benedetti, *Pasolini contro Calvino*, cit; Cf. William F. Pinar, *The Wordliness of a Cosmopolitan Education: Passionate Lives in Public Service* (New York; London: Routledge, 2009).

⁴⁴⁰ Asor Rosa, ‘Calvino dal sogno alla realtà’, *Mondo operaio*, 3-4 (1958), 3-11, pp. 3-4.

colonizer, the male.⁴⁴¹ This same preference of the grotesque body with its fluidity and openness over the eye that distances and detaches is clearly to be found in Mikhail Bakhtin, a very influential thinker in current academia.⁴⁴² Calvino was certainly influenced by Bakhtin's theories at several moments in his career, something that is characteristically almost never mentioned in criticism.⁴⁴³ In summary, within this strongly coherent and rarely problematized discursive field, the distinction between Pasolini the 'body' and Calvino the 'eye' acquires a whole range of extra lateral meanings. The body as subjective truth generally questions the unattainable 'objective' truth, the rational lucidity of the 'eye'.⁴⁴⁴ Suggestive in this respect is Calvino's absence in the volume *Corpo e scrittura* (edited by Ada Neiger), which not only reserves two chapters for Pasolini, but chapters are also dedicated to Vittorini, Pavese, Del Giudice, Fenoglio, De Amicis and even Jeanette Winterson (all writers more or less strongly linked to Calvino).⁴⁴⁵ Some further implications of Calvino as an 'eye', as well as suggestions of a more 'bodily' Calvino in more recent (Anglo-Saxon) criticism will be explored at length in section 4.3.

With or without reference to the body-eye dichotomy, several scholars have attempted to adjust this *chiaroscuro*-landscape of Italian literature as a Klee-like canvas with clearly defined Calvinian areas, shot through by Pasolinian arrows of pure dynamism. Often, this takes the form of a denial of the dominant image of Calvino. These calls to find the cracks in the perfect (and therefore statuesque) image of Calvino are repeated with a certain regularity, for example when Paolo Giovanetti complains about Calvino's 'scritti saggistici citati fino alla nausea, come *Il mare*

⁴⁴¹ Cf. Loredana Polezzi and Charlotte Ross (eds.), *In Corpore: Bodies in Post-Unification Italy* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2007); Arthur Kroker, *Body Drift: Butler, Hayles, Haraway* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012); It should be noted here that from posthuman and mediatic perspectives there are attempts to transcend the body that might contribute to dissolving the inevitable body-eye or body-mind distinction, cf. Brian Rotman, *Becoming Beside Ourselves: The Alphabet, Ghosts and Distributed Human Being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge, Polity: 2013).

⁴⁴² Cf. Galin Tihanov, 'The Gravity of the Grotesque: Bakhtin's Dislocated Humanism', in *Grotesque Revisited: Grotesque and Satire in the Post/Modern Literature of Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. by Laurynas Katkus (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), pp. 5-19, pp. 10-11.

⁴⁴³ Cf. Roberto Milana, 'Calvino e la carnevalizzazione', in *Italo Calvino negli anni Sessanta*, cit., pp. 129-38; Marco Piana, 'L'utopia corporea: Italo Calvino e il mondo alla rovescia', *Carte Italiane*, 2.9 (2014), 53-71.

⁴⁴⁴ Cf. Mark Johnson, *The Body in the Mind: the Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. xiv; Karl Schoonover, *Brutal Vision: The Neorealist Body in Postwar Italian Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012); Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, cit., p. 589.

⁴⁴⁵ Cf. Ada Neiger (ed.), *Corpo e scrittura: rappresentazioni letterarie della corporeità* (Trento: UNI service, 2003).

dell'oggettività o *La sfida al labirinto*' and sets out with the intent to 'scoprire un Calvino meno catafratto di certezze (...) parecchio irresoluto di fronte ai problemi dell'industria culturale'.⁴⁴⁶ An eloquent title can be found in a newspaper article of Gian Carlo Ferretti of 1998, in the period of the Benedetti-debate: 'Ma c'è anche un Calvino nascosto. E più umano.'⁴⁴⁷

Like Calvino, Ferretti has probably gained crucial insights through his work on Elio Vittorini. In a metacritical passage in his work, *L'editore Vittorini* of 1992, he writes the following words, pertinent not only to Vittorini but also very much to Calvino, the student who emulated the master:

Qui si può osservare comunque che Vittorini porta nella sua esperienza una infaticabile insoddisfazione autocritica, una dirompente qualità di perturbazione della 'quiete' letteraria, un audace ricerca del nuovo, e al tempo stesso (...) una disponibilità di sperimentazione che gli consentono sempre di superare quelle contraddizioni, insofferenze e tensioni, senza dovere mettere in discussione i motivi di fondo. In questo intreccio sta (...) il facile rischio (periodicamente realizzatosi) di una versione e assunzione sproblematizzata e riduttiva del suo modo di essere intellettuale, la vasta fortuna cioè di un modello e ruolo tanto *flessibile* da poter attraversare e vivere le più disparate esperienze senza intimamente mutare. Che finisce poi per coincidere, almeno in parte, con le ragioni della fortuna editoriale, critica, di *immagine*, della sua personalità e produzione.⁴⁴⁸

This lengthy quotation serves to illustrate some striking similarities between the two cases of critical fortune and critical use, something that Ferretti must have at least intuited, considering his many volumes on Calvino and his remarks about trying to find a more 'hidden' Calvino (something which he had arguably already done in his *Le capre di bikini* of 1989, focusing on more context-bound, journalistic pieces). The flexibility and omnipresence that pleases some critics about Calvino, turns out to be disturbing for others. This is not simply a division of opinion about the content of books, the rift runs a lot deeper and also involves academic traditions and theories. As Raffaele Donnarumma suggests (taking up earlier suggestions of people like Eco), the success of postmodern types of writing in the 1970s and 1980s seems to have gone hand in hand with the dominance of structuralism in Italian academia. Writers like Eco and Calvino provided academics with an 'estetizzazione della teoria' whereas in turn 'lo strutturalismo ha costruito un monumento alla letteratura

⁴⁴⁶ Paolo Giovannetti, 'Calvino, la scuola, l'editoria scolastica. L'idillio dimezzato', in *Calvino & l'editoria*, cit., pp. 35-82, p. 54.

⁴⁴⁷ Gian Carlo Ferretti, 'Ma c'è anche un Calvino nascosto: e più umano', *Corriere della Sera*, 10 January 1998.

⁴⁴⁸ Gian Carlo Ferretti, *L'editore Vittorini* (Turin: Einaudi, 1992), p. 115.

feticizzata'.⁴⁴⁹ Even if talking about 'dominance' of a literary theory is always difficult and should of necessity be considered as a dominance by degrees instead of an absolute dominance, it is certain that different theories promote theory-specific books and authors as prime examples of what literature is or should be about.⁴⁵⁰ A shift in theoretical interests can thus cause a sudden allergic reaction with regard to writers who had been lauded until that point. Nonetheless, attacks on an iconized Calvino come under the aegis of an equally iconized Pasolini and produce a more and more sterile climate of criticism, as Lucia Re has very convincingly argued, taking aim at the most recent attack on Calvino from a 'Pasolinian' perspective, Alessia Ricciardi's *After La Dolce Vita*.⁴⁵¹ Ricciardi reproaches Calvino for general 'lightness' in Italian society, which not only characteristically reduces Calvino to 'leggerezza', but also expands Calvino's leggerezza to a canonizing value which influences new generations of writers and in this case even Italian culture as a whole.⁴⁵²

The book of Benedetti can be seen as the culmination or materialization of larger developments in Italian literary criticism, of a period in which the self-referentiality, high degree of self-consciousness and the essayistic character of Calvino's (later) prose was increasingly stressed. When Bertone writes about a Calvino who 'soffiò nelle orecchie della critica le parole d'ordine strutturale e le tassonomie da applicare alla propria opera (...) Con la conseguenza, a volte, che a posteriori la critica ha finito per scoprire e riproporre un Calvino perfettamente d'accordo con se stesso', he is pointing out similar issues as Ferretti had done in the case of Vittorini two years before.⁴⁵³ The increasing number of such readings points to a transcending of strictly structural or philological issues and a move back to taking into consideration all that surrounds the book, from the historical and cultural

⁴⁴⁹ Raffaele Donnarumma, 'Postmoderno italiano: un'introduzione', in *Romanzo contemporaneo: voci italiane*, ed. by Franca Pellegrini and Elisabetta Tarantino (Leicester: Troubadour, 2006), pp. 1-27, p. 19.

⁴⁵⁰ Marighetti, 'Calvino difficile', cit., p. 208; Cf. Renato Barilli, *Tra presenza e assenza: due modelli culturali in conflitto* (Milan: Bompiani, 1974), p. 258.

⁴⁵¹ Lucia Re, 'Pasolini vs. Calvino, One More Time: the Debate on the Role of the Intellectuals and Postmodernism in Italy Today', *MLN*, 129.1 (2014), 99-117; Ricciardi, *After La Dolce Vita*, cit.; Cf. Giulio Ferroni, 'Sul canone del romanzo del Novecento', in *Il canone e la biblioteca: costruzioni e decostruzioni della tradizione letteraria italiana*, ed. by Amedeo Quondam (Rome: Bulzoni, 2002), pp. 117-32, p. 129.

⁴⁵² Cf. Luperini, *Dalla centralità del testo*, cit., pp. 170-73; Giannetto, "Oceano mare", cit.; Letizia Modena, 'Italo Calvino e la saggistica del magma: verso un'altra genealogia della leggerezza', *MLN*, 123.1 (2008), 40-55.

⁴⁵³ Bertone, *Op. cit.*, pp. viii-ix.

context, to authorial presence and critical readings (a broadening of scope of which this research in turn is surely a product). In other words: these ‘sudden’ discoveries (which are of course never so sudden as they seem) of cracks in the perfect plaster of ‘Italo Calvino’ are in large part the result of a different way of reading the same ‘material’. In order to further illustrate this point the canonization of Calvino as part of *World literature*, of a transnational canon of (postmodern) masters from an Anglo-Saxon perspective will be put under closer scrutiny in the next section.

2.3 Calvino in the international canon: Calvino-Borges, Calvino-Eco and the postmodern Calvino

For decades and several generations, Calvino has functioned as foreign ‘model’. The huge success of the *Lezioni americane*, considered to be Calvino’s *The Art of the Novel*, has already been singled out in earlier sections. One of the most important differences between the Italian reception of Calvino and the Anglo-Saxon reception of his works is the way in which he has been construed as a postmodern master in the United Kingdom and especially in the United States, whereas in Italy the postmodern character of his texts has mostly been downplayed. Carla Benedetti for example portrays Calvino as a late modernist more than a postmodernist, one of the few aspects of her book that have not been vigorously challenged by other critics.⁴⁵⁴

An often acknowledged moment of canonization of the postmodern Calvino is John Barth’s essay *The Literature of Replenishment* in which he writes: ‘he [Calvino] exemplifies my postmodern program’, furthermore calling Calvino an ‘exemplary postmodernist’.⁴⁵⁵ This foundational text of Barth has been echoed frequently by critics delineating a postmodern genealogy: ‘it would be hard to find a more paradigmatic text [than *Le città invisibili*] to illustrate the postmodern perspective in literature’.⁴⁵⁶ Similarly, David Kolb writes: ‘A postmodern sensibility can be found in some rock videos, in the novels of Italo Calvino, or in some buildings of Charles Moore.’⁴⁵⁷ Interestingly, whereas in Italy postmodernism is often considered as first and foremost an Anglo-Saxon phenomenon, in America as well as in Britain the lack of postmodern models has made of Calvino (as well as Umberto Eco and several other ‘international’ writers) a very useful critical point of

⁴⁵⁴ Benedetti, *Pasolini contro Calvino*, cit., pp. 113-14; Cf. Lawrence Rainey, ‘Italo Calvino: the Last Modernist’, *Modernism/Modernity*, 20.3 (2013), 577-584.

⁴⁵⁵ John Barth, ‘The Literature of Replenishment’, in *Essentials of the Theory of Fiction*, ed. by Michael Hoffman and Patrick Murphy (London: Leicester University Press, 1996), pp. 273-86, pp. 275-76, 284. Cf. also: John Barth, ‘“The Parallels”: Italo Calvino and Jorge Luis Borges’, in idem, *Final Fridays: Essays, Lectures, Tributes and Other Non-Fiction 1995-* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2012), pp. 103-20.

⁴⁵⁶ Robert Dombroski, *Properties of Writing: Ideological Discourse in Modern Italian Fiction* (Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), p. 176; Cf. Curtis White, ‘Italo Calvino and What’s Next: the Literature of Monstrous Possibility’, *The Iowa Review*, 14.3 (1983), 128-139.

⁴⁵⁷ David Kolb, *Postmodern Sophistications: Philosophy, Architecture and Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 5.

departure.⁴⁵⁸ Sometimes, however, the idea that postmodern literature is essentially an Anglo-Saxon occurrence, causes writers like ‘Calvino, Marques, Fuentes, Robbe-Grillet’ to be excluded from discussion, even though they have been ‘convincingly co-opted into the postmodern ‘canon’ over the years’.⁴⁵⁹ The fact that this absence needs to be explained, and that Calvino is the first name that is mentioned in the quoted introduction to the *Cambridge Introduction to Postmodern Fiction*, nonetheless reveals that one cannot easily ‘brush over’ the presence of Calvino in the postmodern panorama.⁴⁶⁰

However, Calvino did not openly define himself as postmodern, which is hardly surprising considering his hesitation to declare himself part of any literary movement (the *Oulipo* being the most notable exception). More unusual considering the scope of his interests is that he hardly ever mentions the postmodern in his essays or his letters, except for in his *Lezioni americane* – written, one should stress here, mostly with an American audience in mind –, where his presentation is clearly detached: ‘La conoscenza come molteplicità è il filo che lega le opere maggiori, tanto di quello che viene chiamato modernismo quanto di quello che viene chiamato il *postmodern*, un filo che – al di là di tutte le etichette – vorrei continuasse a svolgersi nel prossimo millennio.’⁴⁶¹ From this passage it is clear that the movement is not only foreign, but that the label is of no interest whatsoever to Calvino, nor is the distinction between modernism and the postmodern.

Calvino thus did not define himself as postmodern, and – in spite of his frequent borrowings from the genre – was not considered to be a ‘postmodern’ author for a long time in Italy.⁴⁶² As Remo Ceserani has summarized: ‘Quello di Calvino (...) è un caso controverso ed emblematico. Nessuno dei critici italiani (...) sembra disposto ad affrontare la questione del suo rapporto con la cultura

⁴⁵⁸ Smyth, *Postmodern and Contemporary Fiction*, cit., p. 31. Cf. Peter Bondanella, ‘Italo Calvino and Umberto Eco: Postmodern Masters’, in *The Cambridge Companion to the Italian Novel*, cit., pp. 168-81, p. 168.

⁴⁵⁹ Bran Nicol, *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodern Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. xv.

⁴⁶⁰ Cf. Hywel Dix, *Postmodern Fiction and the Break-Up of Britain* (London: Continuum, 2010), pp. 9, 156. Cf. also the inclusion of the 1964 preface to *Il sentiero* in the ‘postmodern’ section of: Martin Travers (ed.), *European Literature from Romanticism to Postmodernism: A Reader in Aesthetic Practice* (London; New York: Continuum, 2001), p. 285.

⁴⁶¹ Italo Calvino, *Lezioni americane: sei proposte per il nuovo millennio* (Milan: Mondadori, 2000), p. 123.

⁴⁶² Francese, *Narrating Postmodern Time and Space*, cit., p. 36; Monica Francioso, ‘Il discorso sul postmoderno in Italia’, in *Da Calvino agli ipertesti: prospettive della postmodernità nella letteratura italiana*, ed. by Laura Rorato and Simona Storchi (Florence: Franco Cesati, 2002), pp. 27-36, pp. 32-36.

postmoderna.⁴⁶³ Even though the postmodern Calvino has received attention also within Italy through the volumes of Remo Ceserani and Monica Jansen (who is, however, working from Dutch and Belgian universities), the image that still surrounds this particular Calvino is mostly that of a hyperliterary figure lost in literary games, in other words: a negative stereotype that has not contributed to stimulating serious research.⁴⁶⁴ Reading Calvino's works from a postmodern perspective or reading his books from a realist framework necessarily changes the resulting deductions. This rather simple looking statement should not be read as regarding only individual perspectives, because these perspectives are partly shaped by cultural and academic contexts and are not necessarily conscious. As Martin McLaughlin has noted in an overview of Calvino criticism until 1996:

it is worth noting that in the one collaborative volume in English (Ricci 1989a) the current bias in Anglo-American studies of Calvino is clear: on the whole it is the semiotic, postmodern Calvino who attracts the attention of these critics, since only one of the fourteen essays (...) deals with the early fiction of the first twenty years of his output.⁴⁶⁵

A similar cross-cultural difference can be seen in the case of Calvino and Eco. Whereas the comparison between the two writers and intellectuals has hardly interested critics within Italy, outside of Italy they have formed a consistent couple over the past decades. This has been reconfirmed through the dedication of an entire conference to the comparison between Eco and Calvino. The conference, entitled *Tra Eco e Calvino: relazioni rizomatiche* had Umberto Eco as a special guest, and Eco himself also contributed with an introduction and some conclusive remarks. But also Calvino rather characteristically still had a say in the proceedings: 'sono, o diventeranno classici Calvino ed Eco? Possiamo provare a rispondere con le parole dello stesso Calvino'.⁴⁶⁶ From the volume a clear idea arises that the prominent position of both authors in the current (international) literary field is due in great part to their critical activities: 'Italo Calvino e Umberto Eco sono autori di numerosi acuti saggi sulla letteratura mondiale, tant'è vero che i due scrittori sarebbero stati tra i

⁴⁶³ Cit. in: Remo Ceserani and Pierluigi Pellini, 'The belated development of a theory of the novel in Italian literary culture', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Italian Novel*, cit., pp. 1-19, p. 13.

⁴⁶⁴ Cf. Remo Ceserani, *Raccontare il postmoderno* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1997); Jansen, *Op. cit.*

⁴⁶⁵ Martin McLaughlin, 'Words and Silence: Calvino Criticism 1985-1995', *Romance Studies*, 14.2 (1996), 79-96, p. 84.

⁴⁶⁶ Rocco Capozzi (ed.), *Tra Eco e Calvino: relazioni rizomatiche* (Milan: EM Publishers, 2013), p. 34.

critici più autorevoli dell'epoca moderna anche se non avessero scritto romanzi.'⁴⁶⁷

A more clear-cut indication of the importance of the critical Calvino, whose themes often correspond to those of the writer Calvino, is hardly possible, certainly when one considers the 'autorevoli', which clearly brings the question of authority to the fore.

In her contribution to the conference (volume), Linda Hutcheon also focuses on Eco and Calvino as prolific and respected critics, whom she calls 'Recensori Modello – non solo Lettori Modello'.⁴⁶⁸ Again, the 'modello' with the capital 'm' is as superlative as one can get in critical terms. However, Hutcheon draws a further connection between the two that goes far beyond similar authority and activity, stating that they were each others 'heirs', that they inherited the worlds that the other had helped shape for them: 'Si potrebbe addirittura dire che Eco romanziere ereditò il mondo *letterario* che Calvino aveva aiutato a creare; del resto Eco – semiologo, studioso e docente universitario – contribuì senza dubbio a creare il mondo *critico* nel quale il lavoro di Calvino ha prosperato.'⁴⁶⁹ This is an avowal of the importance of the interconnection between literary success and critical climate, which can work in both directions: critical success also depends on literary production. In the same volume Capozzi puts forward a similar argument, albeit in a very different guise: Capozzi analyzes the critics, writers, movements, journals and metaphors that the writers share and sums this up as 'Zeitgeist'.⁴⁷⁰ Both the 'Zeitgeist' and the interconnection of critical and writerly interests have been underlined on numerous occasions by Eco himself, who, for example, recognizes that the attention for Jorge Luis Borges must be seen in light of the rise of structuralist and semiological methods (which centred partly on Eco and his *Opera aperta* in Italy) in the 1960s.⁴⁷¹ This suggestion has (presumably) been taken up and extended by Rocco Capozzi, who points to the fact that the academic success of Calvino is 'amongst other things, because of interest in comparative literature and semiotics' in (North-American)

⁴⁶⁷ Martin McLaughlin, 'Calvino, Eco e il canone della letteratura mondiale', in *Tra Eco e Calvino*, cit., pp. 41-67, p. 41.

⁴⁶⁸ Linda Hutcheon, 'Romanzieri come recensori: Eco e Calvino', in *Tra Eco e Calvino*, cit., pp. 68-82, p. 78.

⁴⁶⁹ Hutcheon, 'Romanzieri come recensori', cit., p. 71.

⁴⁷⁰ Rocco Capozzi, 'L'iper-romanzo di Calvino ed Eco: molteplicità, enciclopedia e poetica dell'eccesso.', in *Tra Eco e Calvino*, cit., pp. 302-24.

⁴⁷¹ Eco, *Sulla letteratura*, cit., p. 230-234; Roberto Paoli, *Borges e gli scrittori italiani* (Naples: Liguori, 1997), p. 39. Cf. Cesare Segre, 'Le città invisibili' di Calvino e la vertigine epistemica', *Strumenti Critici: Rivista Quadrimestrale di Cultura e Critica Letteraria*, 19.1 (2004), 43-53.

universities.⁴⁷² Carolyn Springer has added on her part: ‘Even if he were a less gifted writer, Calvino’s popularity with critics would be almost assured by the regularity with which he bears out our claims about literature’, calling *Il castello* an ‘ingenious textbook illustration of structuralist poetics’ and *Se una notte* – Springer continues – mimics reader response criticism with a ‘precision that borders on parody’.⁴⁷³

Most of the underlying ideas of *Tra Eco e Calvino* are not new, since the conference is not presenting new authors, but established ones, which already have a fairly strong critical ‘stamp’. The idea, for example, of Calvino as an ‘architecteur’ or ‘exemplary reader’ is indeed an old and established one.⁴⁷⁴ The spectre of Borges that ‘haunts’ the volume in a none-too-hidden way is indicative of the triangle that the authors have come to form in the course of various conferences – many of which, one should add, involved at least some of the same speakers and attendees. Although it is very legitimate to connect these writers to each other, there is the very real threat of focusing exclusively on the ‘similar postmodern concerns that override their many personal differences’.⁴⁷⁵ Both Eco and Calvino have been classified as postmodern, but they seem to have their specific niche within that framework. They are not ‘simply’ postmodern authors: instead they have become part of a ‘high’ literary canon, which aligns them with the great ‘original’ writers. Even though pastiche and intertextuality are an important and avowed part of their volumes, originality and renewal of tradition continues to be a crucial criterion for canonization. ‘His original content and incisive style have rightly earned him a place in the higher echelons of literary history’, writes Stephen Chubb about Calvino.⁴⁷⁶ Originality and style of writing are two oft-repeated reasons for Calvino’s status as a writer.

With their ‘bestseller di qualità’ both Eco and Calvino expose certain contradictions in critical discourse that have been confronted over the past decades, but which reveal themselves to be particularly resistant to resolution. Critics have promptly recognized the combination of transgression and newness on the one hand,

⁴⁷² Capozzi (ed.). *Tra Eco e Calvino*, cit., p. 10; Cf. Antonello, *Il ménage*, cit., pp. 210-11.

⁴⁷³ Carolyn Springer, ‘Textual Geography: The Role of the Reader in *Invisible Cities*’, *Modern Language Studies*, 15.4 (1985), 289-99, p. 289; On the possible parodic aspects of *Se una notte*, cf. § 4.3.

⁴⁷⁴ Philippe Daros, ‘Les livres des autres ou soi-même comme un autre’, *Littérature*, 92 (1993), 69-82, p. 70; Albert Howard Carter, ‘Flaming Crystals: Calvino’s Dialectical Imagination (and the Reader’s?)’, *Italian Quarterly*, 30.115-116 (1989), 115-23, p. 121.

⁴⁷⁵ Bondanella, ‘Italo Calvino and Umberto Eco’, cit., p. 173.

⁴⁷⁶ Chubb, *I, Writer, I, Reader*, cit., p. vii.

and recognizability on the other hand, in the writing of both authors. This ties in with debates around the contradiction between avant-garde (and thus ‘high’) literary theory (and the literary experimentations which it extols) and editorial practice, with its stigmata of the merely commercial, the repetitiveness and serialization that correspond to bad taste and sheer abandon of aesthetics.⁴⁷⁷ The critical truth that true inventiveness is almost a synonym of true literariness (which, *in theory*, is problematized by Eco’s and Calvino’s works) is, in practice, hard to abandon.⁴⁷⁸ This is illustrated in a comment of Ulrich Schulz-Buschhaus, one of the most sensitive critics to problems of canon and ‘high’ and ‘low’ literature, who nonetheless writes of a Calvino that does not belong to groups, but to himself and some exceptional individuals [read: Borges and Eco] alone.⁴⁷⁹

Those who write about canons rarely do so completely *in abstracto*: generally at least a few names are mentioned to illustrate the point. One of the most important figures in the American critical debate on – and constitution of – canon in the second half of the twentieth century is certainly Harold Bloom. Through his great reputation, he has become almost indissolubly bound to the American canon. Bloom, it should be noted, has been a convinced and resistant representative of the canon as singular, of the normative, exclusive, rather closed-off élite of writers. In the process, he has become also a dubious figure, who in the name of aesthetics cancels out the socio-political aspects of ‘canon’ and (s)elects almost exclusively western, male and ‘classic’ writers.⁴⁸⁰

One of the authors that Bloom has championed in several books is, indeed, Italo Calvino: ‘Much of Italo Calvino doubtless will dwindle away also, but not *Italo Calvino*.’⁴⁸¹ In other words: the recognizable signature of Calvino will live on, even though some details of his writerly profile will be lost along the way. This means that an ‘essential’ Calvino exists, who is instantly recognizable through the originality of his voice. Moreover, ‘Calvino tells you how to read and why’, having the last word

⁴⁷⁷ Cf. Giuseppe Petronio (ed.), *Letteratura di massa, letteratura di consumo: guida storica e critica* (Rome/Bari: Laterza, 1979), p. xxvi.; Ulrich Schulz-Buschhaus, ‘Considerazioni storiche sulla ‘Trivialliteratur’’, in *Letteratura di massa*, cit., pp. 43-58, 54-55.

⁴⁷⁸ Cf. Spinazzola, *Op. cit.*, pp. 186-87.

⁴⁷⁹ Schulz-Buschhaus, *Zwischen »resa« und »ostinazione«*, cit., p. 7.

⁴⁸⁰ Cf. Amilcare Iannucci, ‘The Italian Canon Abroad’, cit., pp. 50-51; Emily Apter, *Op. cit.*, pp. 213-14.

⁴⁸¹ Harold Bloom (ed.), *Italo Calvino* (Broomall: Chelsea House Publishers, 2001), p. 1.

in the 'short story' section of a Bloom volume.⁴⁸² But Bloom does not merely set Calvino apart, he classifies, traces patterns in literary history (just as Calvino himself). Calvino, for Bloom, is a 'maker of icons' like Kafka and Borges.⁴⁸³ And, in a book that is eloquently titled *Genius: a Mosaic of One Hundred Exemplary Creative Minds* (thus capturing what one might call the 'shared originality' of these rather romantic geniuses), Bloom develops the suggested closeness of Borges and Calvino:

In what was our time, the Argentine Borges and the Italian Calvino were the authentic geniuses of fantastic fiction, providing an alternative to Chekhov's dominance of the short story (...) Borges and Calvino, who seem between them to have set a limit beyond which the fantastic story has not been able to go.⁴⁸⁴

The 'Borgesian' or 'Calvinian' story has a distinctive character, and both writers in the eyes of Bloom have achieved a very important feat in the (seemingly motionless) race to a place on the Olympus of writers: that of adding a new type of literature, a new (sub)genre to the canon.⁴⁸⁵ At the same time, this 'new' genre has started to become dominant, to become a very important *vademecum* for those who strive to write fantastic literature or theorize about it. A very specific fantastic canon has thus arisen with Calvino at its centre, a development to which several critics have reacted more or less vehemently, proposing fantastic canons that in their view have come to be obscured in the process.⁴⁸⁶

Calvino and Borges undeniably have much in common, and certainly so in the manner that they have been critically read and 'deciphered'. Their own self-representation has played a significant part in the crystallization of a 'clear' and

⁴⁸² Harold Bloom, *How to Read and Why* (New York: Scribner, 2000), p. 64.

⁴⁸³ Harold Bloom, *The Anatomy of Influence: Literature as a Way of Life* (New Haven, Conn.; London: Yale University Press, 2011), p. 65.

⁴⁸⁴ Harold Bloom, *Genius: a Mosaic of One Hundred Exemplary Creative Minds* (New York: Warner Books, 2002), p. 653.

⁴⁸⁵ Cf. Alastair Fowler, *Kinds of Literature: an Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), pp. 226, 230.

⁴⁸⁶ Cf. Enrico Ghidetti, 'Il fantastico ben temperato di Italo Calvino', *Il Ponte*, XLII.2 (1987), 109-23; Elio Gioanola, 'Modalità del fantastico nell'opera di I. Calvino', *Nuova corrente: Italo Calvino*, 2 (1987), 259-82; Caterina de Caprio, 'Fantastico visionario e fantastico quotidiano nei racconti di Italo Calvino', in *Metamorfosi del fantastico: luoghi e figure nella letteratura, nel cinema, nei massmedia*, ed. by Romolo Runcini (Rome: Lithos, 1999), pp. 74-84; Danielle Hipkins, *Contemporary Italian Women Writers and Traces of the Fantastic: the Creation of Literary Space* (London: Legenda, 2007), p. 24; Fabrizio Foni, *Alla fiera dei mostri: racconti pulp, orrori e arcane fantasticherie nelle riviste italiane, 1899-1932* (Latina: Tunué, 2007); Fabio Camilletti, "'Timore' e 'terrore' nella polemica classico-romantica: l'Italia e il ripudio del gotico', *Italian Studies*, 69.2 (2014), 231-45.

‘workable’ critical image. Two pivotal aspects of their authorial personae are so similar that one could say that they roughly adopt the same posture within the (limited) field of literary distinction. Borges too was a ‘shy and difficult talker’ in interviews, who downplayed the importance of the autobiographical person in famous essays such as ‘Borges y Yo’, and who turned his life into a tale like no other writer did.⁴⁸⁷ Both are recognizable presences that preside over a collected work that is considered to be fragmentary but coherent.⁴⁸⁸ As a consequence, both take on the shades of the fiction they created, sometimes even in direct comparisons with their characters, as this strongly ‘Palomarian’ synthetic description of Borges betrays: ‘like Funes (...) solitary and lucid spectator of a multiform world, instantaneous and almost intolerably precise’.⁴⁸⁹

Another aspect about which Borges and his critics wholeheartedly agree is the importance of his *readership*, which is theoretically seen as superseding and replacing his authorship. Borges is considered to be first and foremost a reader, an opinion which he himself put forward many times, in essays such as ‘Una version de Borges’ (in which he literally writes ‘I am less an author than a reader’), but more famously in much quoted stories like ‘Pierre Menard’.⁴⁹⁰ Interestingly, at the beginning of his career in 1964, Gérard Genette wrote an important essay to help establish this image of Borges ‘the reader’, the title of which (‘La littérature selon Borges’) already betrays the paradoxical importance of authority and authorship for his reading.⁴⁹¹

An important part of Borges’ ‘fragmentary coherence’ in literary criticism is certainly due to metaphors. In a similar vein as we have already seen with Calvino, Borges is indissolubly linked with certain images that recur time and again. Important concepts that are associated with Borges are the mirror, the journey

⁴⁸⁷ Emir Rodríguez Monegal, *Jorge Luis Borges: a Literary Biography* (New York: Paragon House, 1988), p. 284; Cf. Jorge Luis Borges, *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings* (New York: New Directions, 2007), pp. 233, 282-83; Silvina Ocampo, ‘Images de Borges’, in *Jorge Luis Borges: des témoins, correspondance, inédits, interférences, situations, essais, "Borges et Borges," chronologie de l'ultraïsme, biographie, glossaire argentin, bibliographie, iconographie*, ed. by Dominique de Roux and Jean de Milleret (Paris: Herne, 1964), pp. 26-30, p. 26.

⁴⁸⁸ Cf. Emir Rodríguez Monegal, ‘Borges essayiste’, in *Jorge Luis Borges: des témoins*, cit., pp. 343-51, p. 351.

⁴⁸⁹ Monegal, ‘Borges essayiste’, cit., p. 350 [Translation from French mine].

⁴⁹⁰ Jorge Luis Borges, *Páginas de Jorge Luis Borges: seleccionadas por el autor* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Celta, 1982), p. 245; Monegal, *Jorge Luis Borges: a Literary Biography*, cit., p. 263.

⁴⁹¹ Gérard Genette, ‘La littérature selon Borges’, in *Jorge Luis Borges*, cit., pp. 323-27.

(without destination), the library, the encyclopedia and (of course) the labyrinth.⁴⁹² Interestingly, the ‘labyrinth’ in part can be said to be an editorial invention, born when Roger Caillois decided to rename the important French edition of Borges’ *Aleph*, calling it *Labyrinthes* instead (which in turn would also become the title of an English collection). By doing so, he captured Borges in a term that could neatly sum him up according to various consensuses, critical, editorial, readerly.⁴⁹³

The suggestiveness and efficacy of these metaphors are hard to underestimate. In the case of Calvino, Teresa Keane has talked about ‘archilexemes’, to point to metaphors that serve as some sort of ‘meta-metaphors’ one might say, that group different metaphors under one umbrella term which can take on different and even contrasting shades of meaning.⁴⁹⁴ Calvino’s (and Borges’) preference for these types of ‘meta²phors’ that subsume subgroups of metaphors and in some sense harbour metamorphosis and ambivalence within a fairly fixed signifier is evident: the labyrinth is the clearest example of a shared ‘archilexeme’ (Kerstin Pilz calls the labyrinth an ‘absolute metaphor’).⁴⁹⁵ Kathryn Hume finds Calvino’s constancy in the ‘fantastic structures of his imagination’, which is cemented by a ‘cluster of metaphors’.⁴⁹⁶ This ‘idiolect’, as she calls it in an article, is consciously mirrored by the American critic, in a scattered enumeration of images and metaphors in which the single parts presume each other, as the points in the child’s game that – when bound together – take the shape of ‘Italo Calvino’: ‘Things’, ‘Sea’, ‘Flux’, ‘Paste’, ‘Magma’, ‘Maze’, ‘Labyrinth’, ‘Vortex’, ‘Pulviscolo’ (untranslatable?) and ‘Sand’ are mentioned by Hume in quick succession.⁴⁹⁷ Marco Belpoliti similarly accretes metaphors that have spiralled outwards as a pleasantly elusive essence from Calvino’s books, but the most intriguing part is his searching description of what

⁴⁹² Cf. Monegal, *Jorge Luis Borges*, p. 42; Jerry Varsava, ‘The Last Fictions: Calvino’s Borgesian Odysseys’, in *Borges and His Successors: the Borgesian Impact on Literature and the Arts*, ed. by Edna Aizenberg (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1990), pp. 183-99, p. 187; Graciela N. Ricci, ‘Borges y Calvino: lecturas y texturas de lo imaginario’, in *Borges nuevas lecturas*, ed. by Juana Alcira Arancibia (Westminster, CA: Instituto Literario y Cultural Hispánico, 2001), pp. 125-46, pp. 127-28.

⁴⁹³ Ibarra, ‘Borges et Borges’, in *Jorge Luis Borges: des témoins*, cit., pp. 417-69, pp. 439-40.

⁴⁹⁴ Teresa Keane, ‘The “Trap”: a Semiotic Form of Life’, *Recherches Semiotiques/Semiotic Inquiry*, 13.1-2 (1993), 53-67, p. 54.

⁴⁹⁵ Cf. Kerstin Pilz, *Mapping Complexity*, cit., pp. 83, 103.

⁴⁹⁶ Hume, *Calvino’s Fictions*, cit., p. 4.

⁴⁹⁷ Kathryn Hume, ‘Grains of Sand in a Sea of Objects: Italo Calvino as Essayist’, *The Modern Language Review*, 87.1 (1992), 72-85; Cf. Domenico Scarpa, ‘Dieci lemmi calviniani’, in *Calvino newyorkese*, ed. by Anna Botta and Domenico Scarpa (New York: New York University, 1999), pp. 177-204.

they are: ‘archetipo figurativo’, ‘metafore visive’, ‘emblemi’, ‘immagini ricorrenti’, ‘forme e figure’ are some of the terms he uses.⁴⁹⁸ One might certainly argue that Calvino has effectively transposed or ‘translated’ both semiotics and archetypal criticism (mostly of Northrop Frye) into fiction, making this fiction extremely appealing to analysis according to a specific scholarly mode.⁴⁹⁹ Therefore, as Paolo Fabbri recounts –allegedly paraphrasing Umberto Eco – in the case of Calvino ‘non c’è metalinguaggio possibile (...) perché c’è già tutta la semiotica esplicita e implicita’.⁵⁰⁰ This also contributes to the suspicion that Calvino’s books ‘hanno creato la propria critica, instaurando un rapporto di circolarità’, especially in the ‘trilogia semiotica’ of *Il castello*, *Le città* and *Se una notte*.⁵⁰¹

Considering their similarities, it is perhaps not so surprising that the comparison between Calvino and Borges has sprung up rather quickly, especially from Calvino’s *Ti con zero* onwards.⁵⁰² Renato Barilli calls Calvino quite simply a ‘Borges senza angoscia esistenziale’ and the first article to critically compare the two in America was published in 1968.⁵⁰³ Some critics have even voiced their disappointment in what they see as Calvino’s rather sheepish following of Borgesian forked paths, construing *Ti con zero* as a sort of combination between Barthesian and Borgesian premises: ‘ed è un giudizio confermato (troppo confermato) da (...) *Il castello dei destini incrociati*’.⁵⁰⁴ Gore Vidal, without doubt one of Calvino’s biggest admirers, agreed with such an objection: ‘one is disconcerted to encounter altogether too many bits of Sarraute, of Robbe-Grillet, of Borges (far too much of Borges) incorporated in the prose of what I have come to regard as a true modern master’.⁵⁰⁵ Calvino himself even expressed dissatisfaction about the overlap in the critical image between Borges and him:

⁴⁹⁸ Belpoliti, *L’occhio*, cit., p. 9 ff.

⁴⁹⁹ For a very influential example of this, cf. De Lauretis, ‘Narrative Discourse in Calvino’, cit.; Cf. also Jena Habegger-Conti, ‘A Structure for Multiplicity: *Invisible Cities* and Northrop Frye’s *Anatomy of Criticism*’, *Rivista di Studi Italiani*, 21.2 (2003), 121-33.

⁵⁰⁰ Paolo Fabbri, ‘Le trame del bagatto: arcani narrativi e orditi del dire’, in *Narratori dell’invisibile: simposio in memoria di Italo Calvino*, ed. by Beppe Cottafavi and Maurizio Magri (Modena: Mucchi, 1987), pp. 23-33, p. 23.

⁵⁰¹ De Toni, ‘Cornice narrativa’, cit., p. 171.

⁵⁰² Calvino himself already points to his ‘switch’ from Hemingway to Borges in a letter of 13 December 1967, cf. Calvino, *Lettere*, cit., pp. 969-70.

⁵⁰³ Renato Barilli, *La barriera del naturalismo*, cit., p. 308; Donald Heiney, ‘Calvino and Borges: Some Implications of Fantasy’, *Mundus Artium*, 1.2 (1968), 66-76.

⁵⁰⁴ Calligaris, *Op. cit.*, p. 101; Cf. Franco Fortini, ‘La piccola borghesia’, *L’Espresso*, 20-07-1986; Paoli, *Borges e gli scrittori italiani*, cit., p. 40; Fofi, *Op. cit.*, pp. 165-166; Cesare Cases, ‘Calvino al bando’, in idem, *Patrie lettere* (Turin: Einaudi, 1987), pp. 167-71, p. 168.

⁵⁰⁵ Gore Vidal, ‘Fabulous Calvino’, in Bloom (2001), cit., pp. 7-23, p. 20.

la descrizione del «borgesismo» è la sola parte del tuo scritto che ho letto non del tutto volentieri. Perché non vera? No, forse perché troppo vera, e rispondente a un'immagine che ho consapevolmente scelto e tracciato. Ma che già mi comunica un'insoddisfazione, come un territorio ormai esplorato.⁵⁰⁶

In a reading of Calvino in explicit canonical terms, Enrique Unamuno has stressed Calvino's own role in affirming the comparison with Borges, an idea that is in line with the (mild) irritation voiced by Vidal and others about the Borgesian elements in Calvino's fiction.⁵⁰⁷ According to Unamuno, the differences between the two writers are lost in an all too harmonic network of correspondences and appreciations, and he stresses that Calvino's late reading of Borges in 1984 and his posthumous, 'testamentary' remarks in the *Lezioni americane* are usually taken to be the 'true' account of his relation to Borges.⁵⁰⁸ However, what is often overlooked is the canonical function of the comparison, the way that Calvino performs a sort of double canonization, of Borges and of himself at the same time, by consolidating a paradigm, a signature, a recognizable portrait of the unique, creative writer.⁵⁰⁹ Already in a letter to Primo Levi of 22 November 1961, Calvino writes: 'ti manca ancora la sicurezza di mano dello scrittore che ha una sua personalità stilistica compiuta; come Borges (...) qualcosa che è esclusivamente suo (...) la sigla che rende riconoscibili le opere di ogni grande scrittore.'⁵¹⁰ In the essay on Borges included in *Perché leggere i classici*, Calvino adds that Borges' editorial success and his success amongst writers are two sides of the same coin, pointing to the influence of Borges on a more general idea of the possibilities of literature through the creation of his own literary genre.⁵¹¹ Seen in this light, the contention that Borges plays a pivotal role in the supposed watershed of Calvino's career becomes all the more revealing.⁵¹²

⁵⁰⁶ Calvino, *Lettere*, cit., pp. 1184-85. The letter, from 28 November 1972, is addressed to Geno Pampaloni.

⁵⁰⁷ It should be noted here that Calvino is often mentioned simply as a 'follower' of Borges: Cf. Stefan Herbrechter and Ivan Callus (eds.), *Cy-Borges: Memories of the Posthuman in the Work of Jorge Luis Borges* (Lewisburg, Pa.; London: Bucknell University Press, 2009), p. 18; Heather Dubnick, 'Review', *MLN*, 117.5 (2002), 1143-48, p. 1147; Varsava, 'The Last Fictions', cit., p. 184; Benedetti, *L'ombra lunga*, cit., pp. 50-52.

⁵⁰⁸ Unamuno, 'Italo Calvino y su lectura de Borges', cit., 51-73, pp. 53-54.

⁵⁰⁹ Ivi, pp. 54, 56, 61; Cf. Paoli, *Op. cit.*, pp. 25, 29.

⁵¹⁰ Calvino, *Lettere*, cit., p. 695.

⁵¹¹ Italo Calvino, *Perché leggere i classici* (Milan: Mondadori, 1991), pp. 259-60.

⁵¹² Unamuno, *Op. cit.*, p. 53; Cf. Paoli, *Op. cit.*, p. 32.

As seen before, in canonical negotiations the opposed qualities of universality and uniqueness are brought together into a single compound that carries the name and signature of an author, as well as the corresponding metaphors, poetics and authorial image. These opposites of the universal and the singular meet each other like veins and arteries in the capillaries that lead to the heart of a canon, the place that all (critics) know instinctively but not so much rationally. Consider the following exemplary statement about the Argentinian and the Italian writer: ‘both are among the modern writers who most openly recognize the impossibility of originality and yet – or perhaps because of this – they seem among the most original writers of the twentieth century.’⁵¹³

The patterns in literary history that Calvino and Borges helped create have been taken up by critics and become a ‘canonized poetics’ (or a canonized form of reading) in their own right. A complex, intriguing example of this is a statement of Michael Wood, who, after calling the *Lezioni americane* a ‘discreet fragment of autobiography’, reads Calvino’s book through the fantastic phantasm of Borges and ‘the canon’:

What is striking here is the extravagant appropriateness of this reading and viewing for a writer like Calvino. If Borges had invented Calvino, he would also have invented this intellectual genealogy. This is not to say that Calvino is himself predictable or the victim of a modern fashion (...) The genealogy becomes less than a canon and more than a private journey. It is a recognizable track through modernity (...) and it allows us to wonder what writing will be like, what it will miss, when it tries to avoid or ignore a sizable portion of the names I have just mentioned or forget the comics, the painting and the movies.⁵¹⁴

The oscillation and hesitation are evident in this fragment. The ‘extravagant appropriateness’ should not surprise Wood, because Calvino himself carefully weaved his poetics in a certain critical climate, creating a new ‘centre’ out of the margins. The mention of Borges jeopardizes Calvino’s originality, which Wood immediately recognizes and tries to dismantle, judging that Calvino is not the victim of ‘fashion’. In other words: he is not simply copying a Borgesian line. Then, almost inevitably, the word ‘canon’ pops up, to be denied immediately, but at the same time the *Lezioni* are not merely a ‘private journey’. The term ‘recognizable track’ is preferred, even though the difference between ‘canon’ and ‘recognizable track’ is

⁵¹³ Gracia, *Literary Philosophers*, cit., p. 227.

⁵¹⁴ Michael Wood, ‘Hidden in the Distance: Reading Calvino Reading’, in *Italo Calvino*, ed. by Bloom, cit., pp. 93-110, p. 110.

unclear. Wood also concurs that we would not want to miss out on these names, which means that we should not refrain from turning the surreptitiously *suggested* canon into an actual one. The quotation from Wood shows the difficult balancing exercise that critics are asked to perform when referring to matters of canon, which is a suspicious word in anti-canonical times in which being somehow perceived to be marginal seems a more and more important prerequisite for critical attention. Hence the apologetic tone, the attempt of finding new words to avoid mentioning difficult terms like ‘canon’.⁵¹⁵

Borges and Calvino unmistakably had a fruitful fictional dialogue. However, even if one concedes that Borges is ‘the writer who contributed more than anyone else to the invention and acceptance of the new code [postmodernism]’, a reading of Calvino as member of the Borgesian literary family has tended to dominate and sometimes almost monopolize Calvino studies.⁵¹⁶ Arguably, this contributes to making Calvino more recognizable, but also unrealistically predictable. Borges, who in the 1950s and 1960s was far less popular amongst Italian intellectuals because he was generally not considered to be an avant-garde writer, from that point onwards became more and more prominent as literary paradigm through his ‘singularity’ and ‘foreignness’.⁵¹⁷ However, science fiction, a genre that both Borges and Calvino viewed with suspicion (as did most Italian intellectuals at the time), may offer different readings of the canonical shifts in these decades and consequently of Calvino’s works written in that period.

⁵¹⁵ Cf. Andrea Cortellessa’s statement that with the *Lezioni* Calvino performs a ‘dissimulazione poetica’ that is indicative of (and maybe even the starting point of) a more general ‘indebolimento delle poetiche’: Cortellessa, ‘Scritture-reagente’, cit., pp. 41-83.

⁵¹⁶ Douwe Fokkema, *Literary History, Modernism, and Postmodernism* (Amsterdam; Philadelphia: J. Benjamins, 1984), p. 38.

⁵¹⁷ McLaughlin, ‘Calvino, Eco e il canone della letteratura mondiale’, cit., p. 63.

3.1 High & Low Literature: Science Fiction and the genre debate in Italy

Genre is inevitably and intrinsically part of the process of canonization. Therefore, to look at genre in relation to the quick acceptance of Italo Calvino in the literary pantheon of Italy as well as the generally positive reception of his works among the Anglo-Saxon academia and public, can provide insight into the effective workings of canonization and the reasons that facilitate or potentially frustrate canonization.

For a number of reasons, a science-fictional reappraisal of Calvino's works constitutes a good vantage point from which one can present an alternative to accepted readings and reevaluate the process of Calvino's canonization. First of all, many of the differences between the English and American reception of Calvino's work on the one hand and the Italian reception of his books on the other, can be traced back to the way in which his works have been read in a culture-specific context, which tended either to value or to downplay 'popular' genres such as science fiction. But these divergences exist not only in an international, comparative context, but also in a more insulated, national debate that evolved in Italy from the 1950s onwards. Poetical divisions were challenged and reaffirmed, divisions between realism and the fantastic, avant-garde and traditional writers, 'popular writers' and more hermetic, 'academic' writers. These divisions, as always, reflected only part of the effective cultural landscape, and have often resulted in an image in literary history of only contrasts, oppositions, refutations. Partially, this image can be said to correspond to the adversarial model which according to Paul de Man underlies literary culture, in which 'writing against' is pivotal, a writing against that inevitably means a correction of the 'misreading' performed by 'others'.⁵¹⁸

The reception of Calvino is firmly anchored in this polarized cultural field of allegedly and actually adversarial production. This is reflected, amongst other things, in the rough division of Calvino's career in two that has become a critical constant. In 1965, with the publication of the *Cosmicomiche*, Calvino is said to have made a drastic shift towards fantastic literature, away from earlier 'neorealist' works (in which, however, the fantastic element had always already been present).⁵¹⁹ As we

⁵¹⁸ Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight. Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 280.

⁵¹⁹ Cf. Guido Bonsaver, *Il mondo scritto*, cit.; Lucia Re, 'Neorealist Narrative: Experience and Experiment', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Italian Novel*, cit., p. 111.

have seen in section 1.2, it is certainly no coincidence that in 1964 Calvino republished his first work, *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno*, with a preface that has become incredibly and increasingly influential, in which he recontextualizes his debut with the correctional wisdom provided by hindsight. In other words, these years can be seen as pivotal for the development of Calvino's poetics and, even more importantly in the context of this thesis, represent the starting point of a new direction in criticism about Calvino. This shift of Calvino, however, did not take place in some sort of vacuum – an impression one can sometimes get from the autarchic literary universe inhabited by the critically established 'Italo Calvino' – but, as every work, in a cultural context.

In 1959, the publication at Einaudi of an anthology of science fiction, *Le meraviglie del possibile*, destined to become a best-seller and even a long-seller, confirmed the undeniable increase of interest in science fiction in Italy at the time.⁵²⁰ Calvino knew of course of the publication of the volume, edited by Sergio Solmi and Carlo Fruttero, at 'his' publishing house.⁵²¹ Calvino worked closely with Solmi on several occasions and they also corresponded through letters. In the same year of the publication of *Le meraviglie del possibile*, Calvino travelled to the United States, where science fiction was very much at the centre of the literary scene. Some years later, in 1965, Calvino published the *Cosmicomiche*. This new direction, which consisted basically in the fictionalization of a scientific premise, could have provided the perfect example of the expressive possibilities of the new, 'modern', mostly American genre of science fiction in Italy. The reasons why this did not happen are inextricably interwoven with the debates about high and low literature.

On 20 March 1964, Calvino wrote a letter to Franco Lucentini, who also worked at Einaudi and who had taken the place of Sergio Solmi as editor of anthologies of science fiction together with Carlo Fruttero, the first of which had appeared already in 1961. Calvino's letter provides a clear indication of his interest in developing a 'new' literature, as he writes of 'il nostro comune interesse a individuare tendenze letterarie diverse da quelle che ci si aspetta, nel trovare i punti

⁵²⁰ Sergio Solmi, *Le meraviglie del possibile* (Turin: Einaudi, 2006), p. vii.

⁵²¹ 'Calvino, beninteso, ne sarebbe felice', Carlo Fruttero writes to Sergio Solmi on 13 May 1959, regarding the idea to ask Italian writers with the 'hobby della S.F.' to write some of the stories for *Le meraviglie del possibile*. Cf. Bucciandini, *Op. cit.*, p. 19.

deboli di tendenze passate e presenti'. Further on in the letter, he reveals in a more precise manner what he has in mind:

tu per me sei quello di Borges e Robbe-Grillet, sei quello sempre alla ricerca d'una integrazione tra scienza e letteratura, sei quello che faceva progetti di «letteratura cosmica» (...) deve esistere una possibilità di letteratura che elabori altre immagini, altre dimensioni del mondo.⁵²²

Several aspects attract attention in these sentences. First of all, Calvino writes about 'tendenze' instead of 'generi'. Furthermore, there is the reference to Borges, a writer whose poetics Calvino started to juxtapose to his own in those years. The other, Robbe-Grillet, was a key figure of the 'École du regard', with whom Italian critics have often compared Calvino's works. Calvino takes those names as an indication of a specific sort of literature, as representatives of a literature that incorporates science, a 'cosmic literature'. The fact that he does not even mention science fiction, the genre which bears this integration of science and literature even in its name, is revealing, but at the same time logical: Borges and Robbe-Grillet represent a different *type* of literature, a 'high' literature, which belongs to (or strives to be integrated in) a different canon. In this context, it is also important to point out Calvino's early interest in the work of another 'cosmic writer', Raymond Queneau. Calvino praised Raymond Queneau's *Petite cosmogonie portative* and, after having tried to translate it himself, offered his help to Sergio Solmi for its translation at the end of the 1970s.⁵²³ Calvino has often been compared to Queneau, especially because both of them were important members of the French *Oulipo*. What is never mentioned, however, is that Queneau had been interested in science fiction very early on in his career and was one of the most important advocates and importers of the genre in France in the early 1950s.⁵²⁴

Another passage of the letter to Lucentini is also worthy of attention. Calvino states: 'E il mio distacco dal clima letterario vigente lo dimostro riconfermandomi

⁵²² Calvino, *Lettere*, cit., p. 788.

⁵²³ Cf. Christine Baron, 'Science et littérature chez Calvino et Queneau: de la petite cosmogonie portative aux cosmicomics', in *Literature and Science/Literatur und Wissenschaft*, ed. by Monika Schmitz-Emans (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2008), pp. 227-38; Sergio Cappello, *Les années parisiennes d'Italo Calvino (1964-1980): sous le signe de Raymond Queneau* (Paris: Presses de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2007), pp. 105-54.

⁵²⁴ Jean-Marc Gouanvic, *La science-fiction française au XXe siècle (1900-1968): essai de socio-poétique d'un genre en émergence* (Amsterdam: Rodopis, 1994), pp. 171-74; Jean Delisle and Judith Woodsworth (eds.), *Translators Through History* (Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2012), p. 213.

discepolo e socio del più isolato degli uomini della letteratura italiana: Vittorini'.⁵²⁵ Calvino accentuates (one might also say: exaggerates) the isolation of Vittorini, whose imposing editorial presence cannot be denied. However, it is true that Vittorini was not only a man of firm convictions, but also open to new ways of writing, firmly believing in introducing science into literature. It is therefore no coincidence that he showed an increasing sympathy for the upcoming genre of science fiction. In his book series, *Medusa*, Vittorini included a book of the famous science fiction author Ray Bradbury, as well as a book of C S Lewis.⁵²⁶ Moreover, Vittorini was an 'interlocutore privilegiato' for the collaborators of the science fiction journal, *Futuro*, which had a brief but modestly successful existence between 1963 and 1966.⁵²⁷ Vittorini was also one of the 'mainstream' authors who agreed to an interview about science fiction in the same journal (others were Comisso, Bigiaretti, Flaiano, and Soldati) and he reserved praise for certain aspects of the genre: 'La fantascienza ha messo in circolazione, cioè dentro la cultura dell'uomo comune, nuovi elementi linguistici che mi sembrano importanti'.⁵²⁸

It is therefore not surprising that Calvino too showed interest in science fiction, even though his relation to the genre is a problematic one, which seems to be part of the reason for the very scarce interest of critics in that relation. Already in 1961, Calvino praises Mario Socrate in a letter of 23 April for his 'fantapoesie', which may have reminded him of Queneau's *Cosmogonie*, and he adds: 'vorrei fondare un movimento letterario cosmico'.⁵²⁹ In the years after this, he will sometimes reiterate this statement, but leaves this ambition unfulfilled because of a lack of time, and instead will try to encourage Franco Lucentini towards the foundation of such a 'movimento letterario cosmico'.⁵³⁰ Nevertheless, the idea stays with him and returns clearly in the project for a new journal (mostly known as 'Ali Babà'), which is delineated by Calvino in 1970 in the text 'Un progetto di rivista' (and later discussed in the more famous 'Lo sguardo dell'archeologo'):

⁵²⁵ Calvino, *Lettere*, p. 788.

⁵²⁶ Giulio Raiola, Inisero Cremaschi and Lino Aldani (eds.), *Esperimenti con l'ignoto: antologia della fantascienza italiana* (Venezia: Futuro, 1963), pp. iii-iv; Carlo Pagetti, *Il senso del futuro: la fantascienza nella letteratura americana* (Rome: Mimesis, 2012), p. 61.

⁵²⁷ Bruno Brunetti, *Romanzo e forme letterarie di massa: dai misteri alla fantascienza* (Bari: Dedalo, 1989), p. 156.

⁵²⁸ Brunetti, *Romanzo e forme letterarie di massa*, cit., p. 157.

⁵²⁹ Calvino, *Lettere*, cit., p. 679.

⁵³⁰ Cf. Ivi, p. 706.

La letteratura che vorremmo scoprire o inventare, vorremmo rispecchiasse l'umanità terrestre tesa nel nuovo rapporto tra l'individuo, gli altri, lo spazio, il tempo, ciò che è, ciò che non è, di quando si troverà sull'astronave, sulla stazione interplanetaria, nello sbarco su Marte.⁵³¹

The interest of Calvino in science-fiction-like literature is thus evident at the beginning of the 'cosmicomic period' (he wrote the first 'cosmicomica' in 1963), at the start of the project which would accompany him for the rest of his career. Calvino even developed an editorial interest in science fiction that continued the budding regard of Vittorini for the genre. In February 1968, Calvino writes in a letter to the publishing house Zanichelli: 'RACCONTI DI FANTASCIENZA. Ho già fotocopiato e manderò a giorni una ricca scelta di fantascienza del tutto originale rispetto alle altre antologie'.⁵³² This statement is interesting in several ways: first and foremost for the in itself surprising fact (surprising at least, if we consider the usual disavowal of any links between Calvino and science fiction) that Calvino was preparing an anthology of science fiction, which implies reading many science fiction stories and making a selection. Furthermore, Calvino states that it will be a very original selection, that differs from other anthologies: this statement is only possible if he has seen and read other anthologies of science fiction. In other words: this statement reveals that Calvino has been (or at least, claims to have been) reading a considerable amount of science fiction stories (something he never mentioned in interviews). This seems to be a fairly logical consequence of his attention for Anglo-Saxon literature, but has been mostly denied or neglected in literary criticism. In the end, the selection of science fiction stories constituted only part of a bigger Zanichelli anthology for the Italian 'scuola media', which appeared in 1969. The anthology reserves special attention for both science and adventure stories, a setting in which science fiction seems indeed to be in place.⁵³³ In the science fiction section we find two short stories of Ray Bradbury as well as two stories of Frederic Brown, accompanied by introductions about their life and work which are probably written by Calvino. In another part of the anthology, a story of Isaac Asimov is included.⁵³⁴

⁵³¹ Italo Calvino, 'Un progetto di rivista', in Idem, *Mondo scritto e mondo non scritto*, cit., p. 144.

⁵³² Calvino, *Lettere*, cit., p. 983.

⁵³³ Calvino himself stressed that the anthology should mostly be 'divertente' and be an incentive to the 'piacere del leggere' for 'ragazzi': therefore, adventure stories and science fiction fitted the picture very well according to him. Cf. Gianni Sofri, *Del fare libri: mezzo secolo da Zanichelli* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 2013), p. 41.

⁵³⁴ Cf. Italo Calvino, Giambattista Salinari (eds.) [et al.], *La lettura: antologia per la scuola media* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1969).

To some critics at the time, this editorial role of Calvino did not seem too surprising. Andrea Zanzotto, for example, writes: ‘Qui in Italia, dove scarseggiano gli «specialisti», un autore come Calvino ha saputo offrire ottime indicazioni, sta passando dalla favola alla S F, sta curando un’antologia per i ragazzi delle medie, nella quale hanno cittadinanza tutti i momenti della narrativa, e quindi la S F’.⁵³⁵ The fact that Calvino scrupulously prepared an anthology for the ‘scuole medie’, with a more pedagogical function, indicates that he recognized – even if not as a writer, then at least as an editor – the pedagogical quality of science fiction, which has been an important reason for many scientists to appreciate and even write science fiction. Science fiction in the United States was highly valued as pedagogical literature, and many acclaimed authors contributed to so-called ‘juvenile science fiction’ or ‘young adult’ science fiction series.⁵³⁶ Noteworthy in this respect is also that the anthology of Calvino and Salinari contains many adventure stories that represent a long literary tradition, the same tradition of (scientific) romance to which the roots of science fiction have often been retraced.⁵³⁷

Nevertheless, as stated above (and as we will see more in detail in section 3.3), denials of parallels between Calvino and writers of science fiction supersede by and large the few recognitions of thematic, structural, linguistic or other overlap. This critical denial or silence mirrors the doubts that Calvino himself expressed about the genre, since both are formulated with clear reference to fault lines between canons, to divisions in ‘popular’ and ‘high’ literature. Calvino was very aware of the importance of the public, as becomes evident from his open appreciation for ‘popular’ writers such as Charles Dickens and Mark Twain.⁵³⁸ There are, however, clear limits to that, in the sense that he did not really blur distinctions between ‘high’ and ‘low’ literature.

⁵³⁵ Andrea Zanzotto, ‘Alcuni sottofondi e implicazioni della S F’, in idem, *Scritti sulla letteratura: Vol. 2*, ed. by Giovanni Villani (Milan: Mondadori, 2001), p. 69.

⁵³⁶ Neil Barron (ed.), *Anatomy of Wonder: Science Fiction* (New York: R. R. Bowker Co, 1976), pp. 302-7; Neil Barron (ed.), *Anatomy of Wonder: a Critical Guide to Science Fiction* (New Providence: R. R. Bowker Co, 1995), pp. 393-403.

⁵³⁷ Cf. Mark Rose, *Alien Encounters: Anatomy of Science Fiction* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 1981), pp. 7-8.

⁵³⁸ Cf. Loredana Palma, ‘Calvino e il popolare’, in *Il fantastico e il visibile: l’itinerario di Italo Calvino dal neorealismo alle Lezioni americane*, ed. by Caterina De Caprio and Ugo Maria Olivieri (Naples: Libreria Dante & Descartes, 2000), pp. 277-86.

Positive statements of Calvino about science fiction are often larded with a sort of paternalistic mixture of benevolence and severity, as becomes obvious from the following excerpt from Calvino's essay about Charles Fourier, entitled *Per Fourier, la società amorosa* and written in 1971:

La visione d'un futuro globale è emarginata dal pensiero politico, confinata in un genere letterario minore, la fantascienza (...) prigioniero d'un'altra strategia letteraria, più efficace come presa emotiva immediata, il racconto a effetto di spaesamento e avventura, che può pure fissare una rapida riflessione sul domani, ma non ha il potere di mettere in crisi il nostro modo di trovarci qui.⁵³⁹

In this passage, Calvino clearly argues for a qualitative difference between high literature and popular literature, making science fiction the prime example of this. Science fiction embodies a different literary strategy for Calvino, 'imprisoned' in its need for estrangement and adventure, incapable of producing more profound literature that can change our way of being in the world. The difference between an 'easy' and a 'difficult' literature is evident in the distinction that Calvino makes, and it is clear on which side of the boundary he likes to see himself. But this does not mean that he really steers away from science fiction in his works, that he always respects the artificial boundary between a literature that pleases and a literature that challenges. In many of his works Calvino (like Umberto Eco) uses expectations that are bound to the way in which one is 'supposed' to read every single genre in a playful manner, purposefully obscuring established distinctions and ways of reading. He does so also with science fictional elements, as has been signalled already by Francesca Bernardini Napoletano in 1977.⁵⁴⁰ Calvino's remark that science fiction is 'emarginata dal pensiero politico' is also intriguing, in the sense that critics at the time were precisely denouncing the non-political, fantastic direction that Calvino had taken, in their view.

Calvino's editorial education has without a doubt provided him with important lessons about the productive tensions between writing for a mass audience and experimenting, the two poles between which editors of necessity oscillate and negotiate.⁵⁴¹ On 9 May 1962, Calvino writes a letter to another important Italian writer and critic who was theorizing about the cross-fertilization of high and low

⁵³⁹ Calvino, *Saggi*, cit., p. 309.

⁵⁴⁰ Francesca Bernardini Napoletano, *I segni nuovi di Italo Calvino: da «Le cosmicomiche» a «Le città invisibili»* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1977), p. 102.

⁵⁴¹ Cf. Luigi Marfè, 'Per chi si scrive?', cit., pp. 331-338; Alberto Cadioli, 'Il saggista nascosto', cit., p. 209.

culture and who would later put that into practice in his novels: Umberto Eco. Calvino writes to Eco: ‘Cioè uno può dire io uso le forme dell’industria – diciamo: il romanzo giallo, la fantascienza, insomma le forme chiuse, le «macchine» di consumo – e un po’ mi ci alieno un po’ no e così si deve fare per non essere anime belle’.⁵⁴² Again, there is the clear distinction between the ‘industrial’, closed forms of writing, which are basically machines for consumption (and here we can think of Calvino’s own comparisons between writers and machines and his growing interest in cybernetics),⁵⁴³ but Calvino also avows to using these closed forms to renew his own writing, partially adhering to these forms and partially distancing himself from them to create a hybrid that constitutes an acceptable renewal of his writing practice. Renato Barilli reproached Calvino precisely for this distance vis-à-vis the generic material he adopted.⁵⁴⁴ In this light, a comparison with a quote of Pierre Bourdieu about aesthetic distancing can prove enlightening:

This popular reaction is the very opposite of the detachment of the aesthete, who, as is seen whenever he appropriates one of the objects of popular taste (e.g., Westerns or strip cartoons), introduces a distance, a gap – the measure of his distant distinction – vis-à-vis ‘first degree’ perception, by displacing the interest from the ‘content’, characters, plot etc., to the form, to the specifically artistic effects which are only appreciated relationally, through a comparison with other works which is incompatible with immersion in the singularity of the work immediately given.⁵⁴⁵

What Bourdieu describes here sounds surprisingly similar to what Calvino himself writes more concisely to Eco. It seems to apply to what Calvino is doing in many of his works, but more specifically to the way he appropriates and moulds the genre of science fiction in the *Cosmicomiche*, which combine the form of ‘high’ art, the self-reflexivity, attention to language and the conscious (inter)textuality, with the basic storytelling structures of ‘popular’ literature – and first and foremost of science fiction.⁵⁴⁶

Already in the presentation of the first four *Cosmicomiche* in the journal *Il Caffè* in 1964, Calvino presents an alternative genealogy for his tales:

⁵⁴² Calvino, *Lettere*, cit., p. 705.

⁵⁴³ Cf. Antonello, *Il ménage a quattro*, cit., pp. 169-242.

⁵⁴⁴ Barilli, *La barriera del naturalismo*, cit., p. 305.

⁵⁴⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: a Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 26.

⁵⁴⁶ This chapter does not aim to elaborate too much on possible concrete links between Calvino and specific science fiction writers or mechanisms. For more detailed explorations of many suggestions in these sections, cf. Elio Baldi, ‘Italo Calvino and Science Fiction: a Little Explored Reading’, in *Calvino's Combinational Creativity*, ed. by Elizabeth Scheiber (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), pp. 41-61.

Il procedimento delle Cosmicomiche non è quello della Science Fiction (cioè quello classico – e che pur molto apprezzò – di Jules Verne e H. G. Wells).
LE COSMICOMICHE hanno dietro di sé soprattutto Leopardi, i *comics* di Popeye (...), Samuel Beckett, Giordano Bruno, Lewis Carroll, la pittura di Matta e in certi casi Landolfi, Immanuel Kant, Borges, le incisioni di Grandville.

Calvino himself inscribes his work in an intertextual network, in a semi-serious liturgy of names that has in Borges and Leopardi some canonic figures of fantastic literature, but that is also suitably multifaceted and even includes the reference to ‘comic strips’ (it is interesting to note here that amongst the most important sources which brought science fiction to the attention of the Italian public were comics).⁵⁴⁷ At the same time, he distances himself from the genre which might have been too obvious and therefore too ‘easy’ a connection, too much of a critical cage for his stories, which were supposed to be new, innovative, and in that sense ‘avant-gardist’. Calvino’s perpetual game of directing critics to see in his books what he wants them to see, seems to have played a part here. An important detail is, however, that Calvino distances himself mostly from ‘classic’ science fiction, leaving the door ajar for possible connections to contemporary science fiction. Nonetheless, the fact remains that what has been amply recognized – first by Calvino and then by critics – in the case of fairy tales, namely its influence on Calvino’s poetics and the structure of his stories, is almost univocally denied in the case of science fiction.

When we consider the science fiction debate in Italy in general, one of the problems for this debate has proven to be the fact that the idea of what science fiction is has been determined largely by critics with a high cultural resonance but little specific expertise in the field of science fiction (amongst whom, in fact, Eco and Calvino play prominent roles).⁵⁴⁸ In part for this reason, discussions developed largely along fairly predictable lines, reiterating supposedly intrinsic differences between genres. The terms around which the debate revolved are in itself an indication of the underlying premises (and prejudices) of most Italian intellectuals at the time. Several studies and articles were dedicated to the phenomena of ‘paraletteratura’, ‘letteratura di massa’ and ‘letteratura di consumo’. Arguments often proved to be cyclical and aprioristic, validating an outcome that had been established

⁵⁴⁷ Cf. Pierpaolo Antonello, ‘La nascita della fantascienza in Italia: il caso ‘Urania’’, in *ItaliAmerica. L’editoria*, ed. by Emanuela Scarpellini and Jeffrey Schnapp (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 2008), pp. 99-123, p. 106.

⁵⁴⁸ Raiola, *Esperimenti con l’ignoto*, cit., p. 223.

all along. Reviewing and analysing the debate about ‘high’ and ‘low’ literature, Giuseppe Petronio laments in 1979:

la «letteratura» è fatta di *Opere* in conflitto dialettico con il proprio genere, cioè di opere che tendono a rompere i limiti normativi propri del genere; la «paraletteratura» è fatta di *opere* (con la minuscola!) che debbono adeguarsi al genere in tutto e per tutto e se lo travalicano non sono più paraletteratura, e quindi sono letteratura, e quindi non sono romanzi polizieschi: come volevasi dimostrare!⁵⁴⁹

The struggle for visibility of science fiction authors and critics was thus very much a struggle for recognition as ‘literature’, that was not strictly bound to the confines of a limited, ‘pleasing’, but nonetheless superficial genre. At the same time, literary critics and historians were advancing arguments for a less genre-bound literary criticism. Petronio, for example, preferred to speak of ‘linguaggi’ instead of ‘generi’, in order to point out the possibilities for ‘linguaggi’ to move fruitfully across genre borders.⁵⁵⁰ In a contribution in the same volume by Petronio about ‘letteratura di massa’, Ulrich Schulz-Buschhaus puts forward a similar plea for a less vertical, hierarchical approach to literature, arguing that what he calls ‘Trivialliteratur’ is not a closed area ‘situata nei bassifondi della letteratura’, but that it can be found everywhere, including in ‘high’ literature.⁵⁵¹

These literary scholars thereby resuscitate an argument that science fiction adepts, preaching for their own parish, had already put forward time and again in the 1960s. In the 1963 science fiction anthology, *Esperimenti con l’ignoto*, the editors express their wish for science fiction not to be a ‘genere’ but a ‘tipo di letteratura seria’.⁵⁵² The difference between talking about a ‘genre’ or ‘type’ of literature is rather obscure, and it reveals not so much a difference of content as a difference of connotation: the claim is clearly not that what they write is not ‘science fiction’, but simply that it should not aprioristically be excluded from the ‘canon’ of high literature. The very fact that these science fiction authors, editors and critics are aspiring to enter into such a supposedly monolithic canon that, at the same time, they are trying to undermine, renders these kinds of poetical statements rather problematic and ambiguous.

⁵⁴⁹ Petronio, *Letteratura di massa*, cit., p. xxiv.

⁵⁵⁰ Petronio (ed.), *Letteratura di massa*, cit., p. lxx.

⁵⁵¹ Schulz-Buschhaus, ‘Considerazioni storiche’, cit., pp. 43-58.

⁵⁵² Raiola, *Op. cit.*, p. vii.

The critical attitude towards such calls to open ‘the gates’ of high literature is mixed. The positive appreciations of genres such as science fiction by people like Umberto Eco in his famous 1964 volume *Apocalittici e integrati* do not efface the distinction between those genres and high literature.⁵⁵³ One of the critics that showed an overall positive appreciation of science fiction, Gilo Dorfles, wrote for example:

La fantascienza esula, per alcune sue peculiarità, da quelle produzioni che siamo soliti considerare come ‘letterarie’ (...) anche se il racconto di Hoffmann, di Poe, di Calvino o di Borges può contenere degli spunti narrativi che permettono di riallacciarlo alle *Amazing Stories* e ai *Weird Tales*, ciò non toglie che appartengano a una categoria di ‘letterarietà’ totalmente diversa, proprio perché quello che più conta non è il loro nocciolo narrativo, l’intreccio sorprendente, ma il modo in cui la narrazione è stata risolta da un punto di vista letterario.⁵⁵⁴

This statement is strikingly similar to a passage of Calvino quoted above on page 134. Like Calvino, Dorfles thinks of science fiction as a completely (read: qualitatively) different literary category that foregrounds narrative intricacies instead of more complex, more linguistically sophisticated, ways of composing a text. Nevertheless, within science fiction, there exist more literary, ‘higher’ currents, that are more linguistically refined: generally, this type of science fiction is considered to have experienced a boom in the 1960s, with the advent of the ‘New Wave’.⁵⁵⁵ This was, however, not the predominant image of science fiction and Calvino, as we have seen in section 1.2, had not only a reputation as narrator, but also as linguistic master of highly sophisticated prose to defend.

The opponents of science fiction as a genre often struck a far less compromising chord. The most emblematic example of this complete negation that bordered on elitist abhorrence is provided by the esteemed critic Élemire Zolla, who in 1959 refused science fiction in the clearest of terms, talking about ‘idiozia’, ‘regressione’, ‘aberrazioni mentali’, ‘ripetizioni e stereotipi’ and making comparisons with the, to him, equally abominable genres of the western and detective story.⁵⁵⁶ Several aspects are particularly noteworthy about Zolla’s disdain for science fiction: first of all, he was also one of Calvino’s harshest critics at the time, writing a review about the volume *I racconti*, that provoked a response by

⁵⁵³ Cf. Umberto Eco, *Apocalittici e integrati* (Milan: Bompiani, 1964).

⁵⁵⁴ Gilo Dorfles, ‘L’impossibile nel verosimile’, in *La fantascienza e la critica: testi del convegno internazionale a Palermo*, ed. by Luigi Russo (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1980), pp. 44-51, p. 46.

⁵⁵⁵ Cf. on linguistic experiments in science fiction: Walter Earl Meyers, *Aliens and Linguists: Language Study and Science Fiction* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1980).

⁵⁵⁶ Élemire Zolla, *Eclissi dell’intellettuale* (Milan: Bompiani, 1959), pp. 58-59.

Calvino, who admired the critical clarity with which Zolla had dismantled his book.⁵⁵⁷ Two years later, Calvino wrote to Zolla, after the appearance of his novel *Cecilia o la disattenzione*, giving him the advice: ‘Distaccati in una prospettiva più cosmica’.⁵⁵⁸ Another element that is interesting about Zolla’s view on science fiction, is the way in which he points out a lack of innovation as a fundamental problem of the genre: repetition is, generally, considered to be a prevalent aspect in typical ‘genre’ literature, whereas the work of genius stands apart by its originality. It is therefore not surprising that Zolla refers to the western and the detective, but this reference does reveal a further cause for Zolla’s allergic reaction to science fiction, which has cultural roots.

Like science fiction, the western and the detective story were considered to be ‘foreign’, products of importation, with a distinctive, non-Italian character.⁵⁵⁹ This proved to be attractive to some readers, but could also provoke other sentiments, as explained by Sergio Solmi in 1953:

Parlare di *science-fiction* significa per il letterato italiano di oggi superare notevoli resistenze interne (...) Siamo di solito portati ad attribuire il gusto per il genere *science-fiction* a certi tradizionali aspetti «infantili» della mentalità oltre Atlantico e ad accomunarlo con quello per i «fumetti» e altre forme di facile sfogo fantastico.⁵⁶⁰

Science fiction was thus regarded as simplistic literature for ‘consumption’ and pleasure, and this ‘infantile’ nature of the genre was bound up with the image of American culture anchored in many Italian minds.⁵⁶¹

In the 1950s and 1960s, the upcoming Italian science fiction scene, even though marginal in terms of cultural significance, was divided into several strands and several magazines, instead of being a recognizable group uniformly abiding by the same clear, foundational poetics. There were several reasons for discord between the different groups, but the disagreements centred mostly around the place that science fiction had to secure for itself in the Italian literary and cultural panorama. The ambiguity I described above, the tension between an effort of inclusion in the canon and a conscious claim for ‘otherness’, in some cases resulted in different

⁵⁵⁷ Calvino, *Lettere*, cit., pp. 577-78.

⁵⁵⁸ Italo Calvino, *I libri degli altri: lettere 1947-1981* (Turin: Einaudi, 1991) p. 361.

⁵⁵⁹ Carlo Bordini, *Il romanzo di consumo*, cit., p. 34.

⁵⁶⁰ Sergio Solmi, ‘Divagazioni sulla «science-fiction», l’utopia e il tempo’, in idem, *Della favola, del viaggio e di altre cose: saggi sul fantastico* (Milan; Naples: Riccardo Ricciardi, 1971), pp. 45-77, p. 70.

⁵⁶¹ Cf. Antonello, ‘La nascita della fantascienza in Italia’, cit., pp. 99-100.

factions, which at times were involved in bitter conflicts. The interest and ‘infiltration’ of some ‘high’ culture writers in the science fiction scene did not prove equally satisfying for everyone, provoking many mumbles and grumbles as well as uncertainties about which direction to take and the sort of literature which should be promoted. The often heated debate in the early 1960s around the most literary of science fiction journals in Italy, *Futuro*, illustrates this most emblematically.⁵⁶²

The debate about whether science fiction was, and should be, a product of ‘high’ or ‘low’ culture, more often than not implicated cultural issues. Even when the presence of a science fiction scene in Italy had already become undeniable, the question ‘esiste una fantascienza italiana?’ was raised time and again.⁵⁶³ Lino Aldani, Italy’s most well-known science fiction author, half bitterly, half ironically recapitulates: ‘Siamo un popolo di santi, di navigatori, di poeti, di precursori, di geni incompresi e certe volte anche troppo compresi, ma non, enfaticamente non, di scrittori di fantascienza’.⁵⁶⁴ The question of whether Italian science fiction should follow the successful example of its American counterpart or strive to be something distinctively Italian, sharply divided the Italian science fiction scene for many years.⁵⁶⁵ Since science fiction was introduced in Italian culture as a foreign, mostly American product, the adherence to an Anglo-Saxon model was often adopted as an editorial choice to boost sales. This is, for example, evident in the choice of English-sounding pseudonyms by science fiction writers, ‘in the style of’ recognizable, world-famous names of American writers.⁵⁶⁶ The tendency towards a more Italian science fiction often proved to be weaker, to have less visibility, but was nevertheless present, for example when the name ‘fantascienza’ was coined by Giorgio Monicelli as a substitute for the foreign ‘science fiction’.⁵⁶⁷

The wish for a more literary, formally sophisticated, type of science fiction more or less automatically implied the choice of a more Italian science fiction, and

⁵⁶² Cf. Raiola, *Op. cit.*, p. 267; Giulia Iannuzzi, *Fantascienza italiana: riviste, autori, dibattiti dagli anni cinquanta agli anni settanta* (Milan: Mimesis, 2014), pp. 235-79.

⁵⁶³ Vittorio Curtoni, *Le frontiere dell'ignoto: vent'anni di fantascienza italiana* (Milan: Nord, 1977), book cover; Cf. also Giuseppe De Turris (ed.), *Le aeronavi dei Savoia: protofantascienza italiana 1891-1952* (Milan: Nord, 2001), p. v.

⁵⁶⁴ Lino Aldani, *La fantascienza: che cos'è, come è sorta, dove tende* (Piacenza: La Tribuna, 1962), p. 127.

⁵⁶⁵ Raiola, *Op. cit.*, p. 77; Curtoni, *Le frontiere*, cit., p. 54.

⁵⁶⁶ Raiola, *Op. cit.*, p. 78; Curtoni, *Op. cit.*, p. 2.

⁵⁶⁷ Giulia Iannuzzi, ‘Reading Italian Science Fiction’, at: <http://readingitaly.wordpress.com/2014/06/03/science-fiction-memory/>, 03-06-2014.

vice versa, since Anglo-Saxon science fiction had the reputation of being formulaic, repetitive, and thus not ‘innovative’, ‘high’ literature. This was also evident in the circulation of Primo Levi’s (or ‘Damiano Malabaila’s’) ‘scritti un po’ di fantascienza’, as Calvino called them at a reunion of Einaudi.⁵⁶⁸ As Cesare Cases (also an important critic of Calvino) wrote at the time:

Levi si è ritagliato una zona ‘italiana’ di fantascienza, in cui al posto della crudeltà della migliore fantascienza americana c’è la malinconia umanistica, al posto dello stile immediato e sbrigativo una maggior consapevolezza linguistica e un ineliminabile bagaglio culturale; al posto dei grattacieli e delle astronavi un’atmosfera casalinga di gabinetti scientifici, vecchi professori e commessi viaggiatori.⁵⁶⁹

Many people were convinced that what was ‘popular’ in the United States, could not be so in Italy, where science fiction had not grown out of a popular tradition, but had been imported and introduced as a ‘ready-made’ product of another culture, of a technologically more evolved and modern society. This evoked discussion about editorial decisions to sell science fiction primarily as a popular product, as in the distinctly Americanized covers of *Urania*, whereas the Italian readers of science fiction were, allegedly, mostly professionals, scientists, according to a poll of Lino Aldani among science fiction readers.⁵⁷⁰ This discrepancy between the virtual readers that were hypothesized and targeted through editorial strategies and the actual readership of (Italian) science fiction was an example of how the question of popularity and literariness, editorial or artistic prevalence, was an open one that always urged adaptation, correction, revision, for authors of science fiction and ‘high’ literature (where Calvino and Eco are usually reckoned to ‘belong’) alike.

⁵⁶⁸ Tommaso Munari (ed.), *I verbali del mercoledì: riunioni editoriali Einaudi, 1953-1963* (Turin: Einaudi, 2013), p. 513; Cf. Francesco Cassata, *Fantascienza? Science Fiction?* (Turin: Einaudi, 2016).

⁵⁶⁹ Cesare Cases, ‘Difesa di “un” cretino’, *Quaderni piacentini*, VI.30 (1967), 98-101; Cf. Pierpaolo Antonello, ‘Letteratura e scienza’, in *Storia d’Italia: Annali 26: Scienze e cultura dell’Italia Unita*, ed. by Francesco Cassata and Claudio Pogliano (Turin: Einaudi, 2011), pp. 923-48, p. 938.

⁵⁷⁰ Raiola, *Op. cit.*, p. v; Aldani, *La fantascienza*, cit., p. 144.

3.2 Calvino as Science Fiction (and Fantasy) writer outside of Italy: the United States and the United Kingdom

Differences in reception are in large part determined by the dissimilarities in cultural and literary background. Naturally, the literary history of different countries can never be considered as insular, as something that grows in isolation without transnational interconnections. Nevertheless, instead of one, internationally shared canon, one can posit a series of different, national canons, that inevitably form an important part of the lens through which we judge texts. This is bound to bring about different readings of the same text, depending on the chord the text strikes in divergent national contexts.⁵⁷¹

Science fiction has gained far more visibility in Anglo-Saxon than in Italian culture, which logically causes American and English critics to sooner see parallels between Calvino and writers of science fiction (or fantasy). Again, such claims can *de facto* divide literary critics along (old-fashioned) lines of ‘nation’ and ingrained hierarchies of literary criticism: in other words, it is fairly easy to ‘do away’ with a reading of the works of Calvino in the context of science fiction by claiming, or thinking, that such a reading is based upon an insufficient knowledge of the Italian context in which Calvino wrote his books. Very few contributions in English are regularly quoted in Italian articles and volumes on Calvino, and the same can be said about French, German, and other contributions. There are two possible problems here: firstly, that Calvino spent significant periods outside of Italy (living in Paris, but also travelling for longer or shorter periods to, most notably, the United States, Soviet Union, Mexico and Japan) which, together with his ‘international’, mostly Anglo-Saxon and French readings, very much influenced his writings. Secondly, possible ‘different’ readings of his books are, directly or indirectly, downplayed, cut off at the source, providing some loose ends in calvinian criticism that (if studied and included) could provide a more pluralistic, international, image of the writer.

An example of such a rarely explored reading of his work is the abovementioned connection with science fiction. This is not the place to argue that we cannot fully understand Calvino if we do not take this aspect of his work into

⁵⁷¹ Cf. Ezio Raimondi, *Letteratura e identità nazionale* (Milan: Mondadori, 1998); Matteo Di Gesù, *Palinsesti del moderno*, cit.; John Spiers (ed.), *The Culture of the Publisher's Series: Vol. 2: Nationalisms and the National Canon* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

consideration, but it is striking that Calvino has been endlessly compared to Pasolini, Borges, Eco, or other canonized authors and very seldom to the ‘lesser gods’ of the international literary scene. When Francis Cromphout argued in 1989 for consideration of a ‘science fiction Calvino’ he did so in a review and an article in *Science Fiction Studies*. In other words, a non-Italian academic wrote an article in English in a journal about a ‘minor’ genre that was still mostly read outside academic circles in Italy.⁵⁷² In the same number of *Science Fiction Studies*, Cromphout writes a review about Albert Howard Carter’s *Italo Calvino. Metamorphoses of Fantasy*. Carter does briefly consider a possible link with science fiction, but quite incidentally and indirectly, the main focus of his study being Calvino in the context of fantasy. Cromphout would like to see science fiction taken into consideration, but the simple fact that Carter’s book states the genre of reference on its cover, makes it clear from the start from what angle Calvino will and will not be discussed.⁵⁷³ At the same time, however, it is important to remember in which context Carter’s study was published: it is the 13th publication in a critical series entitled ‘Studies in Speculative Fiction’, with earlier volumes treating the works of Ursula K. Le Guin, Philip K. Dick, Shelley and the topic of Soviet Science Fiction.

In his article in *Science Fiction Studies*, Cromphout stresses the way in which a science fictional model allows Calvino to adopt a time that is outside time, a non-historical standpoint from which to judge the world in a consciously estranged but nonetheless committed manner. Cromphout convincingly argues that the cognitive estrangement that Darko Suvin made into the central pillar of science fiction as a genre, is to be found in Calvino too, in a systematic, programmatic manner.⁵⁷⁴ What Cromphout does not do, however, is to offer concrete examples from science fiction that can sustain his argument: possibly, he does not need to do so in a science fiction journal.

Cromphout stresses the combination in Calvino’s *Cosmicomiche* of an aspiration to knowledge and an eye for relativity, a combination that follows logically out of his attention for the sheer infinite possibilities that are enclosed in

⁵⁷² Cf. Carlo Pagetti, ‘Twenty-Five Years of Science Fiction Criticism in Italy (1953-1978)’, *Science Fiction Studies*, 19.6-3 (1979), 320-26.

⁵⁷³ Francis Cromphout, ‘A Question of Genre: *Italo Calvino: Metamorphoses of Fantasy* by Albert Howard Carter’, *Science Fiction Studies*, 16.2 (1989), 236-38.

⁵⁷⁴ Darko Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: on the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1979).

every second of life. According to Cromphout, this prompts Calvino's need for a recognizable style as a conscious way of viewing the world, as a mode of commitment through estrangement. Science fiction is a more than useful tool for Calvino to be able to do so, Cromphout clearly implies.⁵⁷⁵ It is important to point out here that in Italy 'science fiction' and commitment are more or less mutually exclusive, and even more so in the aftermath of neorealism: emblematic is the frequent use of the phrase 'non è fantascienza' to refer to something that is not 'just' an airy fantasy that stands outside reality and has no possibility of actually occurring, no connection or consequence whatsoever with respect to real life.⁵⁷⁶

Cromphout's article seems to have often gone unnoticed by 'mainstream' critics of Calvino. A couple of years later, in 1993, Beno Weiss repeats Calvino's arguments about his books not being science fiction (which we will discuss in the next section), without making a reference to Cromphout.⁵⁷⁷ Although the back cover as well as the opening page of the same book argue that Calvino was 'inspired by' science fiction, a reading in the context of the genre is closed off by taking up Calvino's argument. However, the line of reasoning of Cromphout does not exist in a critical vacuum, but instead is being taken up by several critics in the Anglo-Saxon world, who arrive at similar conclusions from different standpoints (and most of the time, without referring to one another). A key feature of Calvino's *Cosmicomiche*, the science fiction element enclosed in the stories, seems to be encapsulated in one of the few calvinian phrases that has gained more currency outside of Italy than inside the country: 'Altrove altrovoltà altrimenti', from the cosmicomic story 'Priscilla'. In a book that is full of references to Calvino and that presents a peculiar mixture of philosophy, science and literature, Floyd Merrell draws out all the implications and

⁵⁷⁵ Cromphout, 'From Estrangement to Commitment: Italo Calvino's "Cosmicomics" and "T Zero"', *Science Fiction Studies*, 16.2 (1989), 161-83; For a recent, broader but less detailed suggestion, cf. Domenico Gallo, 'Fantascienza Outside the Ghetto: The Science-Fictional Writings of Italian Mainstream Authors', *Science Fiction Studies*, 42.2 (2015), 251-73.

⁵⁷⁶ An intriguing example of this that includes Calvino's *Cosmicomiche* is provided by the book cover of astrophysicist Giovanni Bignami's book *Cosa resta da scoprire*, where we read: 'Non è fantascienza. È un viaggio sulla freccia del tempo verso le scoperte dei prossimi cinquant'anni. Ad accompagnarci c'è il leggendario personaggio delle Cosmicomiche di Italo Calvino, il palindromico signor Qfwfq, che le sa tutte ma non suggerisce niente, pungola l'immaginazione e la castiga ridendo (...) Quando il signor Qfwfq tornerà sulla Terra, la perfetta macchina della verità avrà sradicato la menzogna dal mondo'. Cf. Giovanni Bignami, *Cosa resta da scoprire* (Milan: Mondadori, 2011).

⁵⁷⁷ Beno Weiss, *Understanding Italo Calvino* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), pp. 96-97.

possibilities of thinking in ‘somehow, somewhere, somewhen’.⁵⁷⁸ This ‘elsewhere, elsewhen, otherwise’ is, in fact, a key feature, even present in the title, of Robert Philmus’ chapter on the *Cosmicomiche* in his 2005 volume, *Visions and Re-visions. (Re)constructing Science Fiction*.⁵⁷⁹ This triad of unspecified coordinates is often mirrored by a self-sufficiency of the calvinian cosmos, in the sense that Philmus, Merrell and Cromphout name very few names of science fiction writers to describe Calvino’s narrative universe of estrangement. This means, factually, that he remains the autarchic, creative ‘genius’ who uses homogenous science fiction material for his own innovative purposes.

The ‘science fiction Calvino’ covers, of course, only part of Calvino’s writing career and for that reason certain themes receive more than average attention in articles from a science fiction point of view. In 1987, Christopher Nash is not yet convinced by the ‘hyped’ label of postmodernism, and consciously chooses not to adopt the term, but to speak instead of ‘anti-Realist’ literature. As a consequence, he is not bound in his analysis to postmodern literature and extends it also to science fiction. In his book, which contains an extraordinary amount of references to all of Calvino’s works, Nash writes:

at a superficial level, our association of ‘the marvelous’ in ‘sci-fi’ with a futuristic vision may in this area deceive us. What is Realistically improbable now has in fact only the most tangential basis in expectations, technological or otherwise, concerning ‘the world of the future’. That science may some day put us in a position to *witness* worlds such as these is at this level virtually irrelevant: what provides the rationale for the narrative is that a (different) world, such as that in Calvino’s or in Le Guin’s text with its extra-ordinary dynamics, is *given* as ‘always already there’ whether anyone will ‘get to see it or not’.⁵⁸⁰

Like many other critics, Nash stresses the fact that Calvino’s literary world is intrinsically different from ours, and the way in which he manages to create that world is by conferring upon it the time of fairy tales, a non-time that is also characteristic of the cities of Calvino’s *Le città invisibili*, that are, according to Joseph Francese, ‘removed from the flow of time and spared the heaviness of a historical past’.⁵⁸¹ This metahistorical quality of Calvino’s writing can be found in

⁵⁷⁸ Floyd Merrell, *Simplicity and Complexity: Pondering Literature, Science, and Painting* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1998), p. 178.

⁵⁷⁹ Robert Philmus, *Visions and Revisions: (Re)constructing Science Fiction* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2006), pp. 190-223.

⁵⁸⁰ Nash, *Op. cit.*, p. 66.

⁵⁸¹ Joseph Francese, *Narrating Postmodern Time and Space* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1997), p. 62.

some of the more sophisticated science fiction of the 1950s and 1960s, such as that of J. G. Ballard, whose inventions have, in fact, been praised through a comparison with Calvino.⁵⁸² Such an asymmetrical, unidirectional comparison ('Ballard is like Calvino, whereas Calvino is not like Ballard') is a constant in literary criticism about Calvino.

It is important to point out here that these views on Calvino should not be seen as 'the' Anglo-Saxon reception of the Ligurian writer. There is a similar, but certainly not identical 'main' circulation of his works in the United Kingdom and the United States, which will be viewed in more detail in chapter 4. Moreover, the views on Calvino we have just seen are still fairly 'marginal' views, more specific crystallizations of the general reception of his works by the American and English audiences. These science fictional views are less diametrically opposed to the main reception of his books in these countries as they are with respect to the Italian reception, but they nonetheless are different and not as commonplace as other images that are bound up with the author's name.

This (sometimes subtle) distinction between two strands of reception can often be traced in one and the same text. A good example of this is JoAnn Cannon's book *Italo Calvino. Writer and Critic*, which was published in 1981 and thus does not (could not) include Calvino's fictional and non-fictional 'testaments' – respectively *Palomar* and *Lezioni americane*. Whilst trying to 'put a label' on such a versatile writer as Calvino, Cannon cautions – with a quote of Calvino himself – that there are no real schools and currents in modern Italian literature, a fact of which Calvino himself again provides the best confirmation in a circular reasoning. She then, almost inevitably, scrutinizes the debate about the relation between realism and fantasy, adding also that Calvino 'draws upon science fiction' in his *Cosmicomiche* and *Ti con zero*.⁵⁸³ However, she does not really expand on this, and turns her attention away from science fiction, looking elsewhere for a proper description of the stories: 'to describe *Le cosmicomiche* and *Ti con zero*, one might borrow from

⁵⁸² In a review about Ballard in the *New York Times* of 9 December 1979, Malcolm Bradbury writes: 'His earlier work was usually cast as science fiction, but he has long since worked loose from that pocket. Like many excellent contemporary writers, from Italo Calvino to Thomas Pynchon, he draws on science-fiction methods to create a magical modern fantasy'. Cf. <http://www.nytimes.com/books/98/07/12/specials/ballard-dream.html>, 9 December 1979.

⁵⁸³ JoAnn Cannon, *Italo Calvino*, cit., p. 23.

Borges the term “fictions””.⁵⁸⁴ This little phrase contains an important canonical shift: by borrowing Borges’ term, Cannon is also implying an elective affinity between Borges and Calvino, and this rather sketchily drawn comparison is enough for the reader to ‘comprehend’ the canon of ‘high’ cosmic abstractions that replaces other possible canons, among which we find that of science fiction. In fact, in Cannon’s next chapter, about *Il castello dei destini incrociati*, the name of Borges is mentioned recurrently, as a reconfirmation of this ‘correction’ of the former hypothesis of links to science fiction.

The question remains: what makes such alternative readings of Calvino possible in the first place? Part of the answer lies in the different sorts of science fiction that can be distinguished. The mechanism by which a book ‘transcends’ its genre at the moment it becomes ‘high literature’ – and its author, therefore, a true artist, instead of a mere craftsman – is present also in Anglo-Saxon literature. However, there is a grey area, composed by a number of canonized books, that can be said to be ‘noble’ science fiction, often utopian literature. One can thus discern a more distinguished and a less distinguished type of science fiction.⁵⁸⁵ Books of Orwell, Huxley, Wells, Poe and others did not completely shed their bonds with the tradition of science fiction, and are often analysed in science fiction journals and blogs. Sometimes a distinction is made between the science fiction stories and the rest of a writer’s production, as was the case when Penguin published Poe’s ‘science fiction’ in a separate volume in 1976.⁵⁸⁶

The same grey area can be seen in the case of two strands of modern American literature that have a history of cross-fertilization but also of problematic interchange: postmodernism and science fiction. Authors such as Kurt Vonnegut, Thomas Pynchon (and the same even goes for Vladimir Nabokov) have written novels that can be seen as science fiction, but their status derives from their reputation as postmodern masters and not so much as ‘masters of science fiction’. This is even true for critics such as Frederic Jameson and Jean Baudrillard. Postmodern writers have been very reluctant to recognize the many borrowings from

⁵⁸⁴ Ivi, p. 49.

⁵⁸⁵ Brian McHale, ‘Science Fiction’, in *International Postmodernism: Theory and Literary Practice*, ed. by Hans Bertens and Douwe Fokkema (Amsterdam; Philadelphia: J. Benjamins, 1997), pp. 235-40, p. 236.

⁵⁸⁶ Harold Beaver (ed.), *The Science Fiction of Edgar Allan Poe* (London: Penguin Books, 1976).

the science fiction genre (and vice versa). A special point of interest is what Brian McHale has called the ‘nonsynchronization’ of science fiction and postmodernism. With this term, McHale aims to emphasise the way in which science fiction writers have copied certain outdated formula of postmodernism, and postmodernists in turn have taken inspiration from structures and themes of science fiction that were already decades old. This nonsynchronization would disappear only in the 1980s, arguably because of slowly dissolving boundaries between the different canons to which the two literary types ‘belong’.⁵⁸⁷

The increasing interest in the cross-fertilization of science fiction and postmodernism in the 1980s frequently led to the inclusion of chapters on science fiction in critical studies about postmodernism. An example is a ‘bio-bibliographical guide’ on postmodern fiction that was published in 1986. In the chapter about science fiction in the postmodern era, we read that

the premier parodist of postmodern science fiction is the Italian writer Italo Calvino, and in his books *Cosmicomics* (...) and *T zero* (...) he creates tales that call the languages of both science and fiction into question by exposing the means by which s f texts come into being. As Calvino makes clear, the science fiction text adopts a scientific hypothesis (...) and proceeds as if that hypothesis were true.⁵⁸⁸

Calvino is thus depicted here as the one who makes clear what science fiction actually is, not by abandoning the conventions of the genre, but by parodying them. Precisely this non-correspondence of Calvino’s tales with conventions of science fiction, sometimes led to negative reviews by critics who did not appreciate this ‘deviation’ from ‘mainstream’ science fiction: this is almost a complete reversal of the Italian reception.⁵⁸⁹ Donald Heiney and Gregory Lucente have also discussed Calvino’s tales as satirical science fiction, but they argue that Calvino uses science fiction to satirize, and do not address Calvino’s satirizing stance towards science fiction itself.⁵⁹⁰ Sometimes the difference of Calvino’s science fiction with respect to mainstream (American) science fiction is construed in othering terms, by ‘Italianizing’: ‘The “fantascience” stories (to borrow the Italian term) of Calvino’s

⁵⁸⁷ Brian McHale, *Constructing Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 228.

⁵⁸⁸ Welch Everman, ‘The Paper World: Science Fiction in the Postmodern Era’, in *Postmodern Fiction: a Bio-bibliographical Guide*, ed. by Larry McCaffery (New York: Greenwood, 1986), pp. 23-38, p. 25.

⁵⁸⁹ Albert Howard Carter, *Italo Calvino: Metamorphoses of Fantasy* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1987), p. 75.

⁵⁹⁰ Donald Heiney, ‘Calvinismo’, *The Iowa Review*, 2.4 (1971), 80-88, p. 81; Gregory Lucente, ‘Signs and Science in Italo Calvino's *Cosmicomiche*: Fantascienza as Satire’, *Forum Italicum*, 17.1 (1983), 29-40.

more recent period (...) are almost totally original in technique or literary mode, in spite of the fact that they are built on approximately the same premises as conventional science fiction.’⁵⁹¹

Even Borges and Calvino, as names at least, have entered the canon of science fiction authors. Their names can be found in almost every encyclopedia of science fiction, and their stories are often included in anthologies of the genre.⁵⁹² In 1973, the Polish science fiction writer Stanislaw Lem remarked, however, that this never works the other way around: ‘In today’s science fiction anthologies we find, apart from science-fiction authors, such writers as (...) Calvino (...) but the Upper Realm does not offer any just return. The inhabitants of the Upper Realm are invited to the Lower; they accept the invitations, but there is no return service.’⁵⁹³ Again, this indicates an interesting attempt from the ‘margins’ of science fiction culture to ‘claim’ canonized authors such as Borges and Calvino for their genre. As in other cases, the sheer naming of names, the inclusion of references in anthologies, bibliographies and other types of lists, is enough to suggest a pattern, a link, some sort of content that logically interconnects. This practice can be traced back to the very incipience of science fiction as a genre, when a literary tradition had to be invented to give science fiction a recognizable, distinguished character to be able to pass for ‘real’ literature. The legendary science fiction editor Hugo Gernsback admirably managed to invent such a non-existent tradition for this newborn genre in his periodical *Amazing Stories*. In his first editorial statement, he mentioned high-sounding names as Poe, Verne and Wells, but also Shelley, Hawthorne, Melville, Bulwer-Lytton, Twain and Kipling, many of them also authors to whom Calvino has himself traced back his literary ancestry.⁵⁹⁴

Another reason for the fact that the ‘science fiction Calvino’ retains its visibility as an alternative to the more generally established image of Calvino, is the homage that writers of science fiction, or fantasy, or both, continue to pay to him

⁵⁹¹ Heiney, ‘Calvinismo’, cit., p. 83; Similarly, Carne-Ross writes about ‘gracefully poetic and often extremely funny studies in *fantascienza*’, cf. D.S. Carne-Ross, ‘Writing Between the Lines’, *Delos: A Journal On and Of Translation*, 3 (1969), 198-207, p. 200.

⁵⁹² For Calvino, see, among many others, the volumes in the bibliography of Barron, Disch, Hartwell, Pederson, Philmus, Tuck and the anthology *Last train to limbo*.

⁵⁹³ Stanislaw Lem, *Microworlds* (Orlando, FL: Harcourt&Brace, 1984), p. 67.

⁵⁹⁴ Brian Atteberry, ‘The Magazine Era: 1926-1960’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*, ed. by Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 32-47, p. 34.

even today. Among them are certainly writers as Ursula K. Le Guin, Robert Sheckley, Paolo di Filippo, Thomas Disch, Jonathan Lethem and Bruce Sterling.⁵⁹⁵ Sterling, in whose stories Calvino sometimes figures (even prominently in a story of 2010, 'The black swan'), in a talk in Milan dedicated to the Ligurian writer recalls his reading of the *Cosmicomics* at the age of fourteen: 'Very quickly I learned that science fiction didn't have to be anything like American science fiction'.⁵⁹⁶ These affiliations often stay outside the immediately visible realm of literary criticism, because they are mostly to be found on (science fiction) blogs and websites. An article that, at least on the internet, did receive a lot of attention was posted on 25th July 2014 on the online literary magazine, *The Millions*, by Ted Gioia, who claimed *Le cosmicomiche* to be one of the best science fiction books that until this day however remains largely unknown for readers of science fiction. The article was quickly divulged to other websites and both statements, about *Le cosmicomiche* being science fiction and being largely unknown to science fiction readers, have been energetically challenged in responses to the article.⁵⁹⁷

But the foundation upon which the connection between Calvino and science fiction was originally based consists also of material factors of availability and circulation that can easily be overlooked. As Rebecca West points out, the first books of Calvino to gain a large, non-academic audience in America were *Le Cosmicomiche* and *Ti con zero* in 1968 and 1969, which attracted most of all science fiction fans, who knew little or nothing about Calvino's works before then. This means that the American image of Calvino at the time was cut off from what came before, from the whole Italian debate about Calvino's shift from neorealism to fantastic literature, that reached its zenith and most clear-cut confirmation with the *Cosmicomiche* – which, as we will see in the next section, partially explains the far from easy acceptance of this 'new line' of Calvino in Italy. This is to say that in the United States the neorealist period of Calvino's writing career was simply largely unknown at the time he gained an audience for his *Cosmicomiche*. This is a crucial difference that has certainly contributed to the significantly different way in which

⁵⁹⁵ Cf. Larry McCaffery (ed.), *Across the Wounded Galaxies: Interviews with Contemporary American Science Fiction Writers* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1991), pp. 114, 159; Jonathan Lethem, *The Ecstasy of Influence* (New York: Doubleday, 2011), pp. 31-33, 74-76.

⁵⁹⁶ <http://www.infinitematrix.net/columns/sterling/sterling55.html>, 22-11-2002

⁵⁹⁷ <http://www.themillions.com/2014/07/italo-calvinos-science-fiction-masterpiece.html>; http://www.reddit.com/r/books/comments/2boyso/italo_calvinos_forgotten_science_fiction/, 25-07-2014

Calvino has been perceived throughout the years in the United States with respect to the Italian reception.⁵⁹⁸

The virginal state of the American audience when it came to Calvino's books helps explain the fact that, in order to 'classify' Calvino, the categories of fantasy and science fiction seemed to be the most logical ones. This was of course not only a critical choice, but also part of publishing and marketing strategies: in the 1970s and 1980s, Calvino's *Cosmicomiche* could be found on the shelves with science fiction and fantasy in American bookstores.⁵⁹⁹ The covers of the first editions of *Cosmicomics* in the United States, arguably, breathed a science fiction atmosphere: an interesting example is a by now obscure and forgotten book cover of 1976 on which the praise of Gore Vidal was combined with a description of the tales as 'Ingenious, witty science-fiction parables by Italo Calvino'. This cover, however, clearly 'lost' the editorial and historical 'race' against the still well-known cover with a picture of the moon tied to a rowing boat.⁶⁰⁰

Rereading evaluations of Calvino's work from a science fiction point of view (and moreover in a specific historical and cultural context) can seem rather strange now Calvino has risen to the status of a contemporary classic. Sam Lundwall, for example, wrote in *Science Fiction: What It's All About* in 1971: 'Later Italian writers have shown considerable more independence, for example Italo Calvino, a bizarre writer of quality on a level with the best written in the U.S.A. Today.'⁶⁰¹ Nonetheless, these examples indicate that such a reading was not considered aprioristically futile. Another important indication of the way in which Calvino at the time was considered to be an author whose 'natural habitat' was with science fiction and fantasy books, is the nomination of *Invisible Cities* for a *Nebula Award* in 1976; the *Nebula Award* is an American prize for the best science fiction or fantasy book of the year. *Invisible Cities*, which at the present moment is probably the book that more than any other safeguards Calvino's place at the centre of the canon of high literature in many countries, found itself in a wholly different, exclusively science fiction, canon of nominees for that award: winner Joe Haldeman, Poul Anderson, Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle, Roger Zelazny, Samuel R. Delany, Alfred Bester

⁵⁹⁸ Rebecca West, 'L'identità americana di Calvino', *Nuova Corrente*, XXXIV (1987), 363-74, p. 364.

⁵⁹⁹ Peter Bondanella, *Op. cit.*, p. 176.

⁶⁰⁰ Both covers are added as an appendix to this chapter.

⁶⁰¹ Sam J. Lundwall, *Science Fiction: What It's All About* (New York: ACE Books, 1971), p. 235.

and Vonda N. McIntyre accompanied Calvino.⁶⁰² In the same year, an important critic of fantastic literature, Eric Rabkin provided a description of science fiction that seems to fit Calvino's tales perfectly:

A special case of this definition by *difference* and *organized body of knowledge* is the prescription that a good work of science fiction make one and only one assumption about its narrative world which violates that which is known about our own world and then extrapolates the whole narrative world from that difference.⁶⁰³

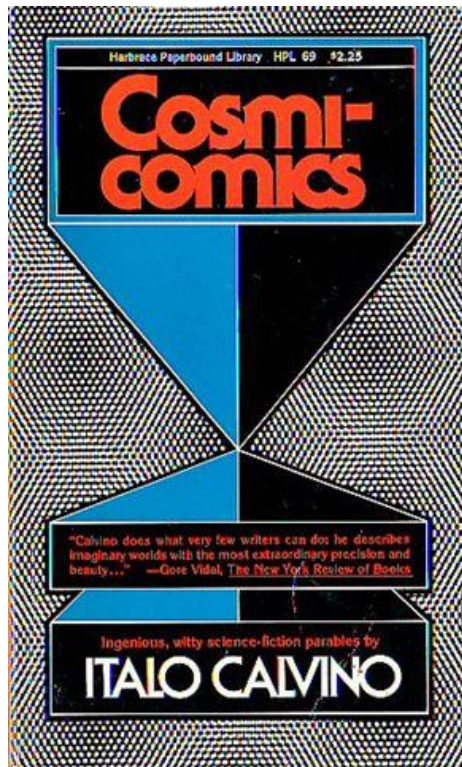
When Teresa De Lauretis, who has published often cited articles on Calvino, wrote an 'In Memoriam' after the Ligurian writer passed away, she did so in *Science Fiction Studies*.⁶⁰⁴ This is another small indication of an interesting 'parallel' reception of Calvino in the Anglo-Saxon world and especially in the United States that we explored in this section. Nevertheless, the more clear the delineation of the 'official', 'trademark' Calvino in Anglo-Saxon criticism becomes, the more a science fiction reading sinks into oblivion. Although alive on blogs, a science fiction Calvino seems, except for very sparse references, hardly 'in the picture' in academic criticism. The number of university courses in science fiction – especially in the United States – that include Calvino indicate, however, that the alternative Calvino is still being explored even within university walls.⁶⁰⁵

⁶⁰² Similarly, Calvino was awarded the Australian *Ditmar Award* for science fiction in 1970 for the *Cosmicomics*, was nominated the year after that for the same award for his *Time and the Hunter*, as well as receiving the *World Fantasy Award* for life achievement in 1982.

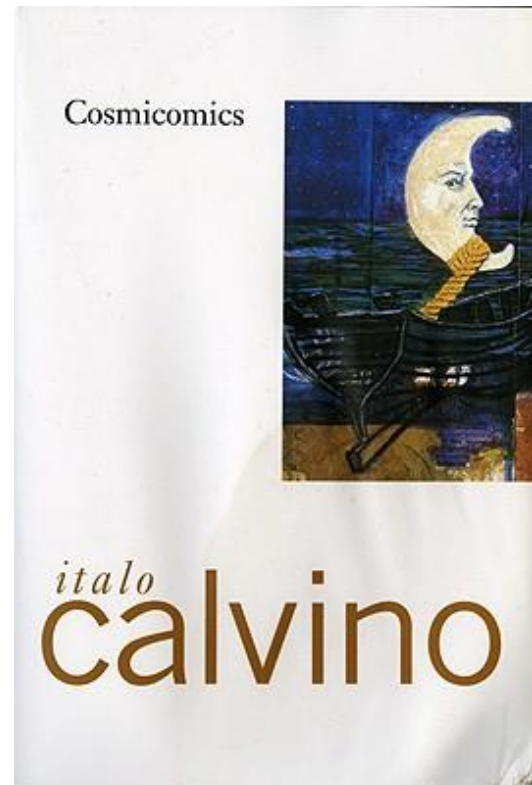
⁶⁰³ Eric Rabkin, 'Genre Criticism: Science Fiction and the Fantastic', in *Science Fiction: a Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by Mark Rose (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1976), pp. 89-101, p. 92.

⁶⁰⁴ Teresa de Lauretis, 'Italo Calvino: in Memoriam', *Science Fiction Studies*, 13.1 (1986), 97-98.

⁶⁰⁵ Cf. Dani Cavallaro, *Op. cit.*, p. 1; <http://www.depauw.edu/sfs/backissues/70/courses70.htm>, November 1996;



The 'science fiction' Calvino



The 'trademark' Calvino

3.3 Between different 'Calvini': selective readings, possible readings

Since Calvino is hardly considered in the context of science fiction in Italian criticism, one would be logically tempted to think that the question of the relation between his writings and science fiction has never been raised. This is, however, not the case: at the moment that Calvino published his *Cosmicomiche*, he was still far from having an established position as a canonized author and not yet firmly part of an (Italian) tradition of high literature. The meaning and the value of the *Cosmicomiche* had thus to be negotiated, within the context of genre, poetics and canon, just as the status and place of science fiction had been a matter for debate since the decade before.

The discussion along the lines of the divergence or similarity between 'high' and 'popular' literature has mostly been implicit, but it underlies most of the critical evaluations of Calvino's first cosmicomic volume (and its sequel, *Ti con zero*). The critical negotiation performed by Calvino himself is not often considered, even though he had an important voice in the cacophony that erupted after the publication of the book. Constituting a seminal text, a recognized 'change of direction' in Calvino's career as a writer, the *Cosmicomiche*, in terms of text and paratext, inevitably contain a statement about the sort of literature Calvino felt he (and others around him) should strive to write. This new direction would bring him close to science fiction, but Vittorio Curtoni has pointed to an important 'distance' that Calvino keeps from that genre: 'Negli anni più recenti, portando alle estreme conseguenze il gusto per il gioco mentale e per l'invenzione stilizzata, Calvino si è avvicinato a qualcosa che alla fantascienza è molto simile, eppure ne diverge nettamente per il rifiuto delle componenti «popolari»'.⁶⁰⁶ These popular components are the most repeated, recognizable part of the genre, which, although they never reflect its most recent or most highly esteemed parts, constitute the core of its identity, through which it can distinguish itself as a genre. Covers adorned with an abundance of aliens and scarcely dressed 'damsels in distress', flashy colours, spaceships and monsters, largely determined the image of science fiction amongst the general public, but also at Italian universities.

⁶⁰⁶ Curtoni, *Op. cit.*, p. 202.

This difference of style often resulted in reviews about the *Cosmicomiche* that acknowledged the superficial ties to science fiction, but that mostly stressed the qualitative, essential difference between the genre and Calvino's 'singular' work. Piero Dallamano, for example, in a review of 12 December 1965 in *Paese senza libri*, argued that the formulae of the genre were an 'ossessione dei fantascientisti, mentre quelle di Calvino sono poesie'.⁶⁰⁷ The colloquial, chatty tone of Qfwfq's explanations is far more prosaic than poetic, which makes it clear that we should not take Dallamano's statement literally. Dallamano argues here that Calvino writes high literature (which, even more so in Italy, is coterminous with the generalized term 'poesia') instead of 'genre literature'.⁶⁰⁸

When Romano Luperini, in 1981, writes about 'modelli fantascientifici' that Calvino adopts in his work, he adds that critics should, in his view, judge mainly single works and not so much genres, contrasting 'paraletteratura' with 'opere d'arte'.⁶⁰⁹ In fact, if we look more closely at the reviews that have appeared about *Le cosmicomiche*, we can see that this qualitative differentiation underlies many of those reviews, often in indirect and somewhat disguised ways, but nonetheless essential to the final judgement. Walter Pedullà, for example, argued in 1965 that Calvino borrows from science fiction to justify a type of literature that is not tied to verisimilitude or realistic temporal linearity, but, in the eyes of Pedullà, the Ligurian author mostly *renews* the genre of science fiction.⁶¹⁰ There is some *imitatio*, but the core of Calvino's work is *aemulatio*. In *La fiera letteraria* of 13 January 1966, Gianluca Gramigna states similarly: 'Ma naturalmente in Calvino nessuno di questi schemi, così grossolanamente codificati, ha più di un valore di trampolino, di stimolo felice a un'attività propria della fantasia; sicché si può anche accettare sullo sfondo per *Le Cosmicomiche* la moda e i modi della *science-fiction*'.⁶¹¹ The banal formulae and mannerisms of *science-fiction* (made even more foreign because of the way it is written, in italics) are acceptable because Calvino 'naturally' uses them only as a trampoline for his creativity. Thinking of Calvino's statements about writing under constraints, using predetermined schemes and formula, as well as his parodic

⁶⁰⁷ In Walter Pedullà (ed.), *Italo Calvino negli anni Sessanta*, cit., p. 497.

⁶⁰⁸ Cf. John Butcher, *Poetry and Intertextuality: Eugenio Montale's Later Verse* (Perugia: Volumnia, 2007), pp. 166-70.

⁶⁰⁹ Romano Luperini, *Il Novecento: apparati ideologici, ceto intellettuale, sistemi formali nella letteratura italiana contemporanea* (Turin: Loescher, 1981), p. 748.

⁶¹⁰ Pedullà, *Italo Calvino negli anni Sessanta*, cit., p. 504.

⁶¹¹ Ivi, p. 514.

copying of popular genres in *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore* and his adherence to the *Oulipo*, one could (with today's knowledge, that is) doubt the validity of such rigid distinctions, that have more often than not been tacitly or overtly reconfirmed until this day.⁶¹² It is important to point out that, in negative reviews, the perceived closeness to science fiction was often posited and the lack of quality of the stories seemed strongly related to their adherence to conventional schemes of science fiction. Pier Raimondo Baldini thinks that the stories represent 'un'evasione fantascientifica', a binary that presents a logic by association (science fiction = evasion) which at the time was certainly dominant.⁶¹³ Giansiro Ferrata makes this even clearer when he discusses what he considers to be 'bozzetti fantascientifici' that 'riescono frivoli e non più che piacevoli e curiosi (...) Certe splendide evocazioni descrittive, dove il rigore e l'eleganza dello stile si uniscono propriamente in altezza, rimangono allo stato di frammento.' Science fiction is thus merely 'pleasant', with writers who are *stylistically* incapable of producing 'high' literature (the 'in altezza' is very suggestive here).⁶¹⁴

At a roundtable after a conference about Calvino in Florence in 1987, Cesare Cases remembered the surprise of the 'old' critics about the direction that the 'new' Calvino had taken with the *Cosmicomiche*.⁶¹⁵ For some reviewers, such as Guido Fink, this meant simply that one had to recognize in the *Cosmicomiche* the 'ultima e ammirevole metamorfosi di un talento proteiforme'.⁶¹⁶ As we can see already in Ovid, a metamorphosis does not mean a complete shedding of one's former identity. The majority of reviewers therefore responded to this new course of a, generally, highly esteemed author by trying to find the line, the *telos*, that bound the *Cosmicomiche* to earlier works of the Ligurian author. This could be done, for example, by emphasising the similarities to the fairy tale, which had occupied

⁶¹² Cf. Brunetti, *Romanzo e forme letterarie*, cit., p. 159; Eugenio Bolongaro, *Italo Calvino and the Compass of Literature* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), p. 125.

⁶¹³ Pier Raimondo Baldini, 'Calvino: "il più povero degli uomini"?', *Forum Italicum*, 10 (1976), 188-202, p. 197.

⁶¹⁴ Giansiro Ferrata, 'Le due strade di Italo Calvino', in *Italo Calvino negli anni sessanta*, cit., pp. 522-26, p. 525.

⁶¹⁵ VV.AA., *Italo Calvino: atti del convegno internazionale, Firenze*, cit., p. 384.

⁶¹⁶ Pedullà, *Italo Calvino negli anni Sessanta*, cit., p. 563.

Calvino as editor for several years and had strongly marked, according to the critical consensus, his trilogy of *I nostri antenati*.⁶¹⁷

Calvino himself actively joined the critical debate, as always. He was dissatisfied with many of the reviews and articles, for example with the statement of an authority such as Gianfranco Contini that the tales contained ‘temi fantascientifici in chiave grottesca e burlesca’.⁶¹⁸ Calvino started to influence the (critical) reception of his work in an efficient and subtle manner that can be compared with other instances in which authors proved themselves to be fine critics and image-builders at the same time, often in alliance with other influential authors and critics. The critical idea, for example, that Ezra Pound was no futurist, has had its strongest advocates in Pound himself and T. S. Eliot, whose statements were quickly adopted by critics.⁶¹⁹

The critical negotiation of Calvino commences already before the publication of the book (as is always the case).⁶²⁰ In letters we have seen on page 129 and 130 he writes about ‘letteratura cosmica’ instead of ‘fantascienza’. The cover of *Le cosmicomiche* is a geometrical drawing of the ‘mathematical’ Dutch artist Maurits Cornelis Escher, far removed from the cliché of the science-fiction cover, instead much more in line with the covers of Calvino’s other books and those of writers like Queneau and Robbe-Grillet.⁶²¹ But the title itself can be construed as the most important intimation of what Calvino envisaged with his collection of stories: *Cosmicomiche* indicates the setting and tone of the book, but it is also a neologism, an idiosyncrasy, that does not belong to a genre and, more importantly, that does not contain ‘fanta’ or ‘scienza’.⁶²² It is interesting to note here, too, that Calvino similarly baptized Levi’s *Storie naturali* ‘racconti fantabiologici’, correcting an earlier definition as ‘fantascientifici’: here, too, Calvino thus stresses the difference

⁶¹⁷ Cf. Ivi, 517-30. For the importance of fairy tales for Calvino’s poetics the bibliography is seemingly endless. Cf. for example the contributions in Delia Frigessi (ed.), *Inchiesta sulle fate. Italo Calvino e la fiaba* (Bergamo: Lubrina, 1988) as well as the volumes of Lucia Re [1990] and Stephen Benson.

⁶¹⁸ Cit. in: VV. AA., *Italo Calvino. Atti del convegno*, p. 243.

⁶¹⁹ Rainey, *Institutions of Modernism*, cit., pp. 11-12.

⁶²⁰ Cf. Anton Kirchhofer, ‘Negotiating the Constraints of Authorship: (Un)authorised Endings in Dickens and Fowles’, in *The Author as Reader: Textual Visions and Revisions*, ed. by Sabine Coelsch-Foisner and Wolfgang Görtzschacher (Frankfurt am Main; New York: Peter Lang, 2005), pp. 139-51.

⁶²¹ Among the discarded options for the cover were the ‘motivi che si direbbero fantascientifici o cosmici’ of the Chilean surrealist Sébastien Matta. Cf. Calvino, *Lettere*, cit., p. 812.

⁶²² A more explicit example of this occurs in a letter of Calvino of 16 November 1964 to François Wahl: ‘Io vado avanti con questa serie di racconti, che non hanno niente a che fare con la fantascienza ma sono un genere interamente nuovo.’ Calvino, *Lettere*, p. 837.

more than he stresses the similarities.⁶²³ This label stuck with Levi's work in Italian criticism, as did the label 'cosmicomiche' – which is of course inevitable, since it is the title of the book. Moreover Levi, like Calvino, was not particularly enthusiastic about a comparison of his 'scientific', probabilistic work with a fanciful, spectacular genre like science fiction. His main argument is that his book, *Storie naturali*, the title of which is an exact facsimile of that of Plinius the Elder (again, this is not, and cannot be, a 'neutral' choice), is not 'fantasia futuristica a buon mercato'.⁶²⁴

When Levi puts forward this argument (which concisely refuses the 'popular' aspect of science fiction as well as the futuristic setting), it has already been reiterated many times before in various occasions, by different writers and critics. In the history of the reception of Calvino's work – which, like Levi's, is not often depicting a future world – the argument that science fiction is about the future, whereas Calvino's text is not, has become some sort of tool for aprioristic denial of any bonds between Calvino and science fiction. Probably the first, and certainly the most authoritative, critic to use this line of reasoning is Eugenio Montale, who in the *Corriere della Sera* writes about a 'fantascienza alla rovescia' that is about the past, not about the future.⁶²⁵ A week later, on 12 December 1965, Paolo Milano endorses this argument by talking of a 'fantascienza capovolta' in *L'espresso*.⁶²⁶ This argument proves a fruitful one, and is taken up by Calvino himself in 1968, when he presents his new volume, *La memoria del mondo e altre cosmicomiche*, with a preface in which he includes, as is his habit, also the critical reception of the work:

Molti critici hanno definito questi miei racconti come un nuovo tipo di fantascienza. Ora, io non ho nulla contro la «science-fiction», di cui sono – come tutti – un appassionato e divertito lettore, ma mi pare che i racconti di fantascienza siano costruiti con un metodo completamente diverso dai miei. La prima differenza, osservata già da vari critici, è che la «science-fiction» tratta del futuro, mentre ognuno dei miei racconti si rifà a un remoto passato, ha l'aria di fare il verso d'un «mito delle origini».⁶²⁷

Before addressing Calvino's argumentation, it is worthwhile to reflect upon the way in which he presents his arguments. He resorts to a sort of metacritical, 'objective'

⁶²³ Cf. Idem, p. 695.

⁶²⁴ Primo Levi, *Conversazioni e interviste (1963-1987)* (Turin: Einaudi, 1997), pp. 106-7.

⁶²⁵ Eugenio Montale, 'È fantascientifico ma alla rovescia (*Le cosmicomiche* di Italo Calvino)', *Corriere della Sera*, 5 December 1965.

⁶²⁶ Cit. in Pedullà, *Italo Calvino negli anni Sessanta*, cit., p. 493.

⁶²⁷ Italo Calvino, *La memoria del mondo e altre storie cosmicomiche* (Milan: Mondadori, 1997), p. vi; Calvino's arguments are often repeated, cf. Bucciandini, *Op. cit.*, p. 24.

point of view, from which he responds to a group of critics with the words of another group of critics, a practice he has used before, for example in the presentation of *Gli amori difficili*.⁶²⁸ He also presents himself as an ‘appassionato e divertito lettore’ of science fiction, combining a benign standpoint with a somewhat patronizing (‘divertito’) tone towards the genre. Moreover, he talks emphatically of ‘science-fiction’, rather symbolically written between quotation marks, thereby addressing the ‘foreign’ movement, which purportedly has no Italian tradition. It is thus as if Calvino wants to say: ‘fantascienza’ does not really exist, so it is more proper to speak about ‘science-fiction’. It should be added that Calvino’s stance towards science fiction is in line with his judgement about modern American literature in general, which for him – so he claims during his journey through the United States – in spite of his advocacy of ‘middle brow’ literature, is only interesting sociologically, and not for its quality and literary value.⁶²⁹

Calvino’s main argument is fairly simple and easily verifiable: science fiction is about the future. A few years before, Montale authoritatively stated the case for Calvino’s tales as ‘fantascienza alla rovescia’, which constitutes even the title of his article; other critics followed, and the statement became a critical constant which can be found even in monographs about Italo Calvino, as in the 1977 volume of Francesca Bernardini Napoletano, who writes about ‘fantascienza capovolta’, even though she does critically scrutinize Calvino’s arguments.⁶³⁰ The only critic I know of that really tackles Calvino’s reasoning in a consistent manner is the aforementioned Francis Cromphout, who emphasizes the existence of many important strands of science fiction that deal with alternate history, a (remote) past or worlds of an unspecified period that seem to stand outside time.⁶³¹ Again, however, the main *image* of science fiction was (and probably still is) that of a genre of the (far) future, of only the most advanced technologies and highly developed societies. In spite of this futuristic reputation, science fiction has many facets in common with utopian literature, a type of literature with an inherent temporal complexity of which

⁶²⁸ Cf. Nigro, *Dalla parte dell’effimero*, cit., pp. 98-101.

⁶²⁹ Calvino, *Saggi*. Vol. II, cit., pp. 2632, 2656.

⁶³⁰ Bernardini Napoletano, *I segni nuovi di Italo Calvino*, cit., p. 70; Cf. Antonello, *Il ménage*, cit., p. 197.

⁶³¹ Cromphout, ‘From Estrangement to Commitment’, cit., pp. 165-67. Cf. also: André Bouissy, ‘Fantaisie, fantastique, ‘fantascienza’ (Zavattini, Buzzati, Calvino et quelques autres)’, in *Letteratura e società: scritti di italianistica e di critica letteraria per il XXV anniversario dell’insegnamento universitario di Giuseppe Petronio*, ed. by Giuseppe Petronio (Palermo: Palumbo, 1980), pp. 649-66, p. 649.

Calvino showed himself acutely aware – an awareness that he lays down in his fiction and, most of all, in *Le città invisibili*.⁶³² Calvino writes about utopian literature:

La critica al presente s'è espresso durante i secoli con più frequenza nel topos letterario del ritorno all'età dell'oro, del passato mitico (...) e poi del buon selvaggio (...) Ma qui occorre dire che in ogni ritorno all'età dell'oro c'è anche una componente utopistica (così come nelle utopie non mancano aspetti di ritorno al passato).⁶³³

Francesca Bernardini Napoletano does systematically correct Calvino's surprisingly imprecise statements about the relation between his work and science fiction, but she does so in a footnote. In the pages before that, she has explored some possible similarities between *Le cosmicomiche* and science fiction, which she identifies for example in the names of the characters (of which the unpronounceable 'Qfwfq' offers a good indication),⁶³⁴ but also in the 'funzione straniante', and certain models of science fiction which characterize Calvino's tales (models that Bernardini Napoletano mentions, but does not really develop).⁶³⁵ In the long, very relevant – but, by its very nature, marginal – footnote, we read the following words, that are reminiscent of Calvino's own about utopian literature of six years before:

Si può osservare che la precisazione di Calvino riguardo al rapporto tra i suoi racconti e la *science-fiction* non è del tutto esatta: non solo uno dei temi più cari alla fantascienza è proprio il viaggio nel tempo, o la rappresentazione del passato, soprattutto dell'epoca preistorica, ma vi è anche tutta una corrente (...) con notevoli interessi cosmogonici (...) Con questi ultimi filoni della *science-fiction*, i racconti di Calvino hanno almeno un importante punto di contatto (...) il genere è un pretesto per situare in un contesto prefigurato, convenzionale – lo Spazio – situazioni ed immagini che, ovvie e banali nella vita e nell'ambiente quotidiano, acquistano nuovo rilievo e ritornano degne di attenzione in un contesto incongruo.⁶³⁶

Like Cromphout, Bernardini Napoletano clearly, albeit somewhat euphemistically ('non è del tutto esatta'), repudiates Calvino's and Montale's future-argument.⁶³⁷ She also points to the fact that Calvino's second argument (in which he states that his tales estrange the banal realities of everyday instead of making visible that which is

⁶³² Cf. Paul Smethurst, *The Postmodern Chronotope: Reading Space and Time in Contemporary Fiction* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), p. 112.

⁶³³ Cf. Calvino, 'L'utopia pulviscolare', in *Saggi*, cit., p. 309.

⁶³⁴ Cf. Loredana Polezzi, *Translating Travel: Contemporary Italian Travel Writing in English Translation* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), p. 174.

⁶³⁵ Bernardini Napoletano, *Op. cit.*, pp. 63, 64, 70.

⁶³⁶ *Ivi*, p. 71.

⁶³⁷ For a more general discussion about the interrelation of future and past in science fiction, cf.: Casey Fredericks, *The Future of Eternity: Mythologies of Science Fiction and Fantasy* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1982), pp. 149-52.

as yet unimaginable)⁶³⁸ is not tenable as a difference if one takes into consideration a certain strand of science fiction. Bernardini Napoletano thus makes clear (albeit in a footnote) that Calvino refutes the genre by adopting a monolithic, sterile image of it, which does not correspond to the historical, necessarily plural, reality.

Calvino seemed to recognize the plausibility of the question whether his stories were science fiction as well as the importance of the answer, something which can be gathered from the fact alone that he returned to the matter on several occasions, even twenty years later. Already in an 'autointervista' of November 1965 the title 'Calvino: niente fantascienza' thickly underlines the essence of the interview. He asks himself the question: are the *Cosmicomiche* science fiction?⁶³⁹ This is an implicit recognition of the validity of the question. He answers in denial and repeats this denial in an interview in 1967: 'Non parlerei di fantascienza: questo è un genere ben definito e molto diverso dalle cose che scrivo io.'⁶⁴⁰ Calvino thus seems to argue from a well-defined idea of what science fiction is, even though the suspicion is warranted (considering the 'arguments' which we have seen already) that this is a fairly stereotypical, outsider-idea of the genre, the clarity of which is inversely proportional to the actual knowledge of diverse strands of science fiction.

Nevertheless, a development in his judgement over time is visible and his certainty gives way to embrace a more ambivalent stance, more akin to the 'atteggiamento volutamente ambiguo nei confronti della scienza (...) e della letteratura fantascientifica' that Franco Petroni confirms to have glimpsed in 1976.⁶⁴¹ The year before, Calvino had published a new 'postilla' to accompany his *Cosmicomiche*:

La «fantascienza» (in inglese «science-fiction»: gli autori più famosi sono inglesi e americani) è un genere a sé che può essere considerato (accanto al romanzo poliziesco) la più tipica forma di «letteratura popolare» del nostro secolo, nei suoi prodotti migliori presenta una stimolante intelligenza nelle invenzioni, nella trovata che sostiene il racconto, ma per quel che riguarda l'arte dello scrivere si tiene a un livello di buon artigianato tradizionale. Non diremmo che questi di Italo Calvino

⁶³⁸ 'è il diverso rapporto tra dati scientifici e invenzione fantastica. Io vorrei servirmi del dato scientifico come d'una carica propulsiva per uscire dalle abitudini dell'immaginazione, e vivere anche il quotidiano nei termini più lontani dalla nostra esperienza; la fantascienza invece mi pare che tenda ad avvicinare ciò che è lontano, ciò che è difficile da immaginare, che tenda a dargli una dimensione realistica o comunque a farlo entrare in un orizzonte d'immaginazione che fa parte già d'un abitudine accettata', Italo Calvino, *La memoria del mondo*, cit., p. vi.

⁶³⁹ Calvino, *Sono nato*, cit., pp. 111-13.

⁶⁴⁰ Ivi, p. 133.

⁶⁴¹ Franco Petroni, 'Italo Calvino: dall'«impegno» all'arcadia neocapitalistica', *Studi Novecenteschi: Rivista Semestrale di Storia della Letteratura Italiana Contemporanea*, 5.13/14 (1976), 57-101, p. 97.

possano essere definiti racconti di fantascienza (anche se in qualche caso si trovano delle somiglianze) e non solo perché la fantascienza è di solito «racconto d'anticipazione» (...) sono soprattutto la forma letteraria e lo spirito che essa esprime a essere diversi.⁶⁴²

In his usual 'detached' third person, Calvino admits that there are similarities with certain types of science fiction, but his somewhat snobbish stance towards a slightly inferior genre, the stylistic quality of which is rarely completely satisfying (and here a comparison with the judgement of Giansiro Ferrata on page 156 readily presents itself), still rings loud and clear through his words. In the posthumous *Lezioni americane*, Calvino again takes up his argument about the estrangement of everyday life that he produces in *Le cosmicomiche*. An important nucleus that Calvino indicates for the coming into being of his cosmicomic tales is evidenced in the following statement from the lecture about *visibilità*:

Nelle *Cosmicomiche* (...) il mio intento era dimostrare come il discorso per immagini tipico del mito possa nascere da qualsiasi terreno: anche dal linguaggio più lontano da ogni immagine visuale come quello della scienza d'oggi. (...) La scienza mi interessa proprio nel mio sforzo per uscire da una conoscenza antropomorfa: ma nello stesso tempo sono convinto che la nostra immaginazione non può essere che antropomorfa; da ciò la mia scommessa di rappresentare antropologicamente un universo in cui l'uomo non è mai esistito, anzi dove sembra estremamente improbabile che l'uomo possa mai esistere.⁶⁴³

Noteworthy in this quotation is, amongst other things, the fact that Calvino reverses his former statement, claiming the exact opposite of what he stated in 1968 about the difference between his tales and science fiction (cf. footnote 623). In other words, that which then seemed to create an unbridgeable gap between his book and the genre, has now suddenly become a reason to include his book in the genre.⁶⁴⁴ It is precisely this 'science fiction Calvino', the Calvino who 'ha intuito la resa letteraria di sguardi extra-umani, non umani, non identificabili' that also formed an inspiration for Wu Ming.⁶⁴⁵

Another interesting element is the similarity of Calvino's words with declarations from the 1960s about the essence and the function of (Italian) science

⁶⁴² Calvino, *Saggi*, cit., pp. 1304-5.

⁶⁴³ Calvino, *Lezioni americane*, cit., pp. 89-90.

⁶⁴⁴ And this quote of Calvino can also constitute an important part of a possible answer to Giovanni Falaschi, who in 1972 stated firmly that Calvino's work was not science fiction, through a blatant misrepresentation of both science fiction and the *Cosmicomiche*, cf. Giovanni Falaschi, 'Italo Calvino', *Belfagor*, 5 (1972), 530-58, pp. 551-52.

⁶⁴⁵ http://www.wumingfoundation.com/italiano/WM1_saggio_sul_new_italian_epic.pdf, 18-08-2008, p. 28.

fiction. A striking example is an article of 1961 by Laura Conti, ‘Alla ricerca delle radici storiche e psicologiche del racconto di fantascienza’, in which Conti explained that: ‘La fantascienza è... uno dei risultati del divorzio tra la scienza e l’immaginazione: le entità, i concetti, le relazioni che appartengono alla scienza contemporanea sono sempre più lontani dalla fantasia umana: proprio per questo la fantasia umana si sbriglia nell’immaginare i risultati pratici’.⁶⁴⁶ One of the programmatic (which is not to say actual) differences of Italian science fiction with respect to Anglo-Saxon science fiction, was the importance that was given by Italian writers to the ‘umanizzazione dell’universo e universalizzazione di ciò che è umano’, which was considered to be the trademark of the Italian stories in the genre.⁶⁴⁷ A journal like *Futuro* consciously presented itself as an alternative to a technological science fiction in which machines were the predominant factor, choosing instead to shift the focus to ‘l’uomo (...) col suo carico di valori inattuali e per questo affidati alla memoria, ad antiche fosforescenze nelle quali ancora resiste l’ultima traccia della sua *humanitas* perduta’.⁶⁴⁸

Calvino has often been compared with writers who have been claimed to be science fiction writers, but are not considered as such in Italy (and often neither in the United States and the United Kingdom, at least not outside the science fiction scene). These are the more ‘noble’ science fiction authors or precursors, who are canonized as classics and in this sense transcend the genre, such as Edgar Allan Poe, George Orwell, H. G. Wells, et cetera. Carlo Pagetti, an important pioneer among Italian science fiction critics and expert of Anglo-Saxon science fiction, emphasizes this point in his article of 1988 about the relation between Calvino, fantasy and science fiction. Pagetti argues that Calvino can be compared to a certain strand of science fiction, but probably not so much to the (stereotypical) Anglo-Saxon one. Calvino’s ‘linguaggio dell’immaginario scientifico’ resembles a more intellectual, specific type of science fiction, of writers such as Kurt Vonnegut or Stanislaw Lem.⁶⁴⁹ An investigation of science fiction books that resemble Calvino’s in structural, thematic or stylistic ways, can thus bring other, less well-known, branches

⁶⁴⁶ Cit. in: Carlo Pagetti, *Il senso del futuro: la fantascienza nella letteratura americana* (Rome: Mimesis, 2012), p. 36.

⁶⁴⁷ Raiola, *Op. cit.*, p. 6.

⁶⁴⁸ Brunetti, *Op. cit.*, p. 155.

⁶⁴⁹ Carlo Pagetti, ‘Italo Calvino, il fantastico, la fantascienza’, in *Inchiesta sulle fate*, cit., pp. 61-72, pp. 66-68.

of science fiction to the fore, including an Italian one: ‘Le possibilità fabulatorie dei materiali fantascientifici (...) trovano in Calvino una risposta, una rielaborazione geniale, capace anche di portare alla luce certi fermenti non abbastanza indagati della cultura italiana degli anni ’50-’60’.⁶⁵⁰ Pagetti is here referring mostly to the work or (editorial) activities of well-known authors such as Tommaso Landolfi, Corrado Alvaro and Elio Vittorini. Pagetti addresses his critique to literary critics in general, but he is also admonishing science fiction critics for ‘missing’ certain incursions of non-science fiction writers in the genre. This is a reiteration of an earlier instance in *Science Fiction Studies* in 1981, when he wrote: ‘Ironically, the shadows of Buzzati and Morselli and the very concrete presence of Italo Calvino on the Italian literary scene are totally ignored’.⁶⁵¹

As a conclusion to this section, it is therefore interesting to point to some of the remarkable theoretical similarities that provide the background for Calvino’s *Le cosmicomiche* and Italian science fiction of the 1950s and 1960s alike. Vittorio Curtoni divides writers of science fiction books into different categories and names Calvino as the most important amongst the ‘atipici’ or ‘irregolari’, a category that includes ‘contributi occasionali di forti personalità letterarie inserite in contesti nazionali indipendenti’.⁶⁵² Curtoni then proceeds to a brief analysis of what he considers to be a coherent undercurrent of science-fiction-like writing in Calvino, whom he sees as part of an atypical Italian literary tradition that includes, amongst others, Galileo Galilei and Giacomo Leopardi – a statement that is completely in line with the tradition in which Calvino liked to insert himself. But, Curtoni adds, writers such as Calvino and also Dino Buzzati, do not incorporate typical genre components of science fiction in their books.⁶⁵³ Nevertheless, there are some resonances between Calvino and science fiction, amongst which Curtoni singles out the ‘sense of wonder’ – which has been argued to be the core of science fiction by many science fiction critics –⁶⁵⁴ as well as the temporal aspect of some of Calvino’s writings, as exemplified by his fantastic trilogy *I nostri antenati*: ‘I tre libri costituiscono altrettanti momenti di una meditazione che va a ritroso solo per proiettarsi nel futuro,

⁶⁵⁰ Pagetti, ‘Italo Calvino, il fantastico, la fantascienza’, cit., p. 69.

⁶⁵¹ Carlo Pagetti, ‘Recent Italian Criticism on Utopia and Science Fiction’, *Science Fiction Studies*, 8.1 (1981), 99-100, p. 100.

⁶⁵² Curtoni, *Op. cit.*, pp. 3-4.

⁶⁵³ Ivi, 191.

⁶⁵⁴ Cf. James and Mendlesohn, *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*, cit., p. 3.

solo per cogliere (...) il senso del tempo che l'uomo d'oggi vive'.⁶⁵⁵ Curtoni thus reverts the time argument, which has been used over and over again to argue against a connection between Calvino and science fiction, and instead uses it as a confirmation of that connection.

The uncertainty about the place of *Le cosmicomiche* within the context of science fiction remains sometimes simply unresolved in a book or article, because, as we have seen until this point, this placement very much depends on the definition of the genre one adopts, or the particular strand of science fiction one considers. Enrico Ghidetti offers a good example of this, by presenting (in a very calvinian manner) two diametrically opposed views, without offering a final solution:

Con le *Cosmicomiche* Calvino (...) sembra confermare in pieno l'ipotesi di Roger Caillois della continuità tra fiaba, racconto fantastico e fantascienza come momenti storicamente successivi della fenomenologia letteraria del sovrannaturale e del meraviglioso (...) Ma a questo schema interpretativo si potrebbe obiettare, con Michel Butor, che la fantascienza di Calvino in realtà sfugge ai requisiti fondamentali del genere dal momento che non offre nessuno dei «tipi di spettacolo» che «l'agenzia turistica della fantascienza propone ai clienti»: la vita futura, i mondi ignoti, i visitatori inattesi.⁶⁵⁶

This quote contains many elements which we encountered before: the obligatory argument that Calvino does not write about the future, but also the argument that, in order to belong to the science fiction genre, a book should present itself as belonging to that genre, through superficial characteristics, labels, outward signs, determined by the 'tourist agency' of science fiction. This sociological, relativistic view (science fiction is that which is considered to be science fiction by writer and public) is often adopted, but it also forms a way of circumventing the debate. But Ghidetti also mentions Roger Caillois, whose theories about the relation of science fiction, fantastic literature and fairy tale, which Caillois considered to be historically specific expressions of a shared, anthropological core, gained some currency in literary criticism in those years.⁶⁵⁷

Einaudi's Sergio Solmi presented a similar point of view, exploring the analogies between the historical phenomenon of the 'romanzo cavalleresco' and science fiction, both of which are adventurous genres which centre around the

⁶⁵⁵ Curtoni, *Op. cit.*, p. 200.

⁶⁵⁶ Enrico Ghidetti, 'Il fantastico ben temperato di Italo Calvino', in *Italo Calvino: atti del convegno internazionale*, cit., p. 180.

⁶⁵⁷ Cf. Roger Caillois, *Anthologie du fantastique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966).

discovery of new worlds. Solmi adopts terms such as ‘folklore scientifico’ and even ‘fantascienza ariostesca’ when he talks about science fiction.⁶⁵⁸ In his introduction to the anthology for Einaudi, Solmi sets forth his view of science fiction stories as modernized fairy tales, because they use ‘regole del gioco’ that are ‘strutturazioni razionali’ and ‘paradossi fisico-matematici’ instead of ‘formule magiche’.⁶⁵⁹ This must all have sounded very attractive to Calvino, who was in charge of the ‘Notiziario Einaudi’ – the booklet in which new publications were presented to libraries and bookshops – when Solmi himself presented the anthology in the ‘Notiziario Einaudi’ under the title ‘La fantascienza come il romanzo cavalleresco’.⁶⁶⁰

In his introduction to *Le meraviglie del possibile*, Solmi also presents a genealogy of the genre, in which he names, amongst others, Lucian, Cyrano (also according to Calvino himself “il primo vero precursore della fantascienza”), Kepler and Swift.⁶⁶¹ Pagetti provides a similar list, as does Lino Aldani, who also adds Edgar Allan Poe.⁶⁶² Again, canons meet and this seemingly neutral naming of names is, in fact, a continuous process of redefinition of boundaries of genre and canon; naming is in fact an effort of (re)appropriation, similar to what Qfwfq experiences in the critically successful cosmicomic story *Un segno nello spazio*.

Interestingly, the possible reasons for exclusion from the canon of high literature are alike for Calvino and science fiction: Calvino is no poet, but very much a prose and short story writer. Science fiction as a genre is almost exclusively prosaic, and a large part of science fiction publications consists of short stories. Both Calvino’s works and science fiction have been criticized for lacking sexuality, as well as psychological depth, for representing a type of writing in which intricacies of plot are more important than development of character or psychology. Many of these arguments are ‘topoi’ of genre criticism about popular literature, which admittedly often lacks psychological depth, introspection, interiority.⁶⁶³

⁶⁵⁸ Solmi, ‘Divagazioni sulla «science-fiction»’, cit., pp. 65, 69.

⁶⁵⁹ Solmi, *Le meraviglie del possibile*, cit., pp. xiii-xiv, xxiii.

⁶⁶⁰ Massimo Bucciantini, *Op. cit.*, pp. 21-22; For Calvino’s role in the ‘Notiziario Einaudi’, cf. Cesare Segre, ‘Italo Calvino e il Notiziario Einaudi’, in *Calvino & l’editoria*, cit., pp. 21-34; Michele Martino (ed.), ‘Calvino editor e ufficio stampa: dal *Notiziario Einaudi* ai Centopagine’, on: <http://www.oblique.it/images/formazione/dispense/calvino-editor-ufficiostampa.pdf>, 2012

⁶⁶¹ Calvino, *Lezioni americane*, cit., p. 26.

⁶⁶² Solmi, *Le meraviglie del possibile*, cit., p. xi; Aldani, *Op. cit.*, pp. 20-25, p. 28; Pagetti, *Il senso del futuro*, cit., p. ix.

⁶⁶³ Cf. Brunetti, *Op. cit.*, pp. 14-15.

Another element which Calvino shares with science fiction can be deduced from the following quote of Gillo Dorfles in the year of the publication of *Le cosmicomiche*. Dorfles writes about science fiction as an ‘interpretazione fantastica di dati scientifici’ that has shifted from nuclear science to ‘adattamento dell’antropologia, della linguistica, della cibernetica, della semantica generale, della neuropsichiatria, della genetica, e via dicendo; la ragione del successo di queste inserzioni pseudo-scientifiche rientra a mio avviso in un altro fenomeno che è quello dell’adozione dei gerghi specifici’.⁶⁶⁴ Dorfles could have been talking about Calvino’s book instead of science fiction, so pertinent is his list of sciences, as well as his assertion about the adoption of pseudo-scientific passages and specific jargon which creates the scientific impression that partly explains the success of these tales (as well as of other books of Calvino).

Dorfles’ analysis resonates with the theories of the most well-known Italian science fiction writer of that period, Lino Aldani, who stressed that the ‘science’ part of science fiction was mostly superficial, and that fantasy was more important. Moreover, for Aldani science fiction could be about past, present or future alike.⁶⁶⁵ The most important aspect of science fiction, for Aldani, was to develop a fantastic premise in a coherent manner, which is exactly what happens in *I nostri antenati* and the *Cosmicomiche*.⁶⁶⁶ This opinion was shared by many science fiction critics, amongst whom Carlo Pagetti: ‘Ciò che distingue la ‘science fiction’ dalla narrativa genericamente fantastica è il rispetto d’una logica interna, non quella della realtà ordinaria, ma quella evocata dalle stesse invenzioni, teorie, scoperte, che popolano, e in un certo senso, delimitano la narrazione’.⁶⁶⁷ Science fiction, in Italy, was thus generally regarded as literary and formally complex, abiding to consciously adopted rules and limitations that spurred creativity and fantasy. This was precisely what attracted Roland Barthes in the writing of Calvino. Barthes states that Calvino elaborates

a very singular imagination (...) establishing a connection between the imagination and the mechanical (...) there is an element of Edgar Poe in Calvino, because he poses a sort of situation that is, generally speaking, so to say, unrealistic, from the point of view of the verisimilitude of the world, but only in the starting point,

⁶⁶⁴ Cit. in: Curtioni, *Op. cit.*, p. 25.

⁶⁶⁵ Aldani, *Op. cit.*, pp. 9, 14.

⁶⁶⁶ Ivi, pp. 16-17.

⁶⁶⁷ Pagetti, *Il senso del futuro*, cit., p. 16.

because, afterwards, this unrealistic situation is implacably realist and implacably logical.⁶⁶⁸

There is another part of Calvino's highly formalized and formatted speculations that is similar to science fiction. One could say that Calvino in his *Le cosmicomiche* is mostly interested in basic mental categories that regulate our perception (and thus also our knowledge) of the world: the Kantian imperatives of time and space. With every cosmicomic tale he seems to reinvent these basic categories all anew, hereby unlocking the ontological potential inherent in every epistemological shift. The way in which our basic concepts of perception are challenged by making them polysemous is not exclusive to science fiction, but certainly an interesting and intrinsic part of many science fictions.⁶⁶⁹ Vittorio Curtoni has pointed out that this holds true not only for *time* in science fiction narratives, but also for other mental categories which in science fiction are exteriorized and continuously reshaped. Curtoni states: 'Potremmo caratterizzare la fantascienza come *locus semantico* privilegiato: la sua natura di narrativa fantastica la rende partecipe della polisemia, mentre la componente scientifica le attribuisce anche caratteri d'univocità'. He illustrates this with the example of space:

prendiamo uno dei termini più ricorrenti sin dall'inizio nella letteratura di *science-fiction*: *spazio*. Da un punto di vista scientifico tale termine è univoco (...) da un punto di vista narrativo, qualora diventi teatro di azioni fantastiche o comunque non reali, lo spazio assume immediatamente una profondità polisemica di grande suggestione, e lo stesso discorso vale per tutti i termini scientifici cui la fantascienza si è servita.⁶⁷⁰

In almost all of the *Cosmicomiche* we see this science-fiction mechanism at work.

Another quote of Curtoni may serve as conclusion to this chapter. In the *impegno* debate around Calvino, in English criticism there is a tendency to view the engagement of the Sanremese writer in a more positive light than is often the case in Italian criticism.⁶⁷¹ Curtoni, however, talks about a morality of non-realist literature: 'C'è una moralità persino nella speculazione assoluta; ed è la moralità di chi dopo aver indagato a lungo nel tempo presente, dopo essersi tuffato nel tempo trascorso, trova consolazione, e vie ispirative nell'assoluto di un tempo che ancora non

⁶⁶⁸ Roland Barthes, 'La mécanique du charme', in Italo Calvino, *Le chevalier inexistant* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1984). The translation into English is mine.

⁶⁶⁹ Cf. Rose, *Alien encounters*, cit., pp. 21, 31-32.

⁶⁷⁰ Curtoni, *Op. cit.*, p. 26.

⁶⁷¹ Cf. § 2.2 and § 4.2 of this thesis.

esiste'.⁶⁷² Again, commitment means something different from a science fiction point of view than for the 'realist' writer.

Different judgements on Calvino's (lack of) engagement partially derive from the different cultural background of his critics, which is also anchored in literary traditions. A more consistent consideration of Calvino within a science fiction context may, therefore, also contribute to a reevaluation of his way of engaging with the world through fiction. But there are of course many more different, partially uncharted, Calvini, some of which will be traced in the next chapter.

⁶⁷² Curtoni, *Op. cit.*, p. 303.

4.1 Italo Calvino in translation: cosmopolitanism and *italianità*

As stated in the introduction to this thesis, strictly separating different receptions would be artificial, since there is always overlap and boundaries are continually crossed: between high and low, as well as between national and transnational frames of reference. Accordingly, the ‘alternative’ Calvinis which are proposed in the last chapter are not inherently ‘non-Italian’, ‘English’, or ‘American’. Nevertheless, one can certainly say that certain readings have been predominant in Anglo-Saxon criticism which traditionally may have remained somewhat under the radar in Italian criticism. In this chapter one might say that an ‘Englishizing’ and ‘Americanizing’ view of Calvino is adopted: more Anglo-Saxon critics are quoted and the cultural lens shifts (as it started to in the previous chapter). However, the dialogue with Italian criticism is woven throughout the sections, to the extent that it is woven throughout transnational critical exchanges, thereby implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) mapping those exchanges.

Calvino and translation: it is a long-standing marriage. But, inevitably, translation changes an author, be it his fiction, his essays or his image. Calvino has been called, by one of his less well-known translators (in a very critical review of William Weaver’s prize-winning translation of the *Cosmicomiche*), an ‘easy writer in the sense that his novels make agreeable reading (...) but not necessarily easy to translate’.⁶⁷³ The effort to ‘place’ an author who comes from a different literary tradition and writes in a different language is visible in criticism about his work: Calvino has recurrently been depicted as ‘part of nothing’, as a sort of island, ‘both traditional and modern, both insular and universal’.⁶⁷⁴ Critics have become increasingly cautious of universalizing what is central to one’s own culture, but Calvino’s relatively eccentric position (at least with respect to the Anglo-Saxon literary canon) arguably makes such claims to universality somewhat less suspicious.⁶⁷⁵ In a similar manner, Calvino is presented often as oblivious to fashion: ‘postmodernism was not a fashion imposed on him from without but a force arising from within’.⁶⁷⁶ This rather magical or spiritual phrasing – ‘force arising from

⁶⁷³ Carne-Ross, ‘Writing Between the Lines’, cit., p. 199.

⁶⁷⁴ Olken, *With Pleated Eye and Garnet Wing*, cit., p. 13.

⁶⁷⁵ Cf. Dominic Jullien, ‘In Praise of Mistranslation: the Melancholy Cosmopolitanism of Jorge Luis Borges’, *Romanic Review*, 98:2/3 (2007), 205-23, pp. 206-7.

⁶⁷⁶ Markey, *Italo Calvino*, cit., p. 88.

within' – denotes once again Calvino's originality, the idea that he bears within him, as 'inspiration' one might say, what other writers need to copy from a tradition, a culture, an environment.

This situation brings Laura Di Nicola, from an Italian point of view, to conclude that 'l'autore all'estero è privato (...) dal quadro di riferimento, si presenta come un fenomeno isolato decontestualizzato (...) diverso da sé, la sua immagine sfocata, intrisa di stereotipi, o forse portatrice di quegli stereotipi che all'estero richiedono agli autori italiani.'⁶⁷⁷ Apart from the inevitable truth in this statement (cultures do not possess the same framework of references and knowledge), at the same time there is a problem with the suggestion that stereotypes are only to be found in foreign reception, for (at least) two reasons: it implies a clear-cut separation between various circuits of circulation and it seems to signify that stereotypes are only born from a lack of precise knowledge, from 'immagini sfocate'. The contrary, however, can also happen: *too* precise images are, almost by definition, stereotypes, all too straight lines that subtly iron out 'fractal'-reality. Calvino himself met with American and English culture, both in books and in life, and incorporates these instances in his life and work. However, Calvino himself in *Eremita a Parigi* already suggests the (too) neat demarcation between his Italian image and his foreign reputation that Di Nicola has delineated.⁶⁷⁸

Translation is essentially imperfect, as are language and writing, and Calvino knew this all too well. The intrinsic connections between translation and writing, writing being a form of translation, were often underlined by the Ligurian writer, who was, one might say borrowing from Emily Apter, very aware of the 'decisionism of translation – tangible in the hypothetical alternatives that haunt the words that a translator finally selects'.⁶⁷⁹ Since the translator is an inevitable usurper of the authorial position and style, Calvino was well aware of the dangers of translation, of the 'tradimento del mio stile', especially coming when from a 'lingua minoritaria' like Italian: 'So bene che tutte le traduzioni sono cattive. So che per il

⁶⁷⁷ Laura Di Nicola, 'Il canone inverso', cit., p. 67.

⁶⁷⁸ 'Certo l'immagine dello scrittore cambia perché in Italia uno è visto per tutto l'insieme delle sue attività, nel contesto di una cultura fatta di tante cose (...) mentre all'estero sono solo i libri tradotti che arrivano come dei meteoriti, attraverso i quali critici e pubblico devono farsi un'idea del pianeta da cui si sono staccati.' Calvino, *Eremita a Parigi*, cit., p. 236; Cf. Calvino, *Sono nato*, cit., pp. 149-50.

⁶⁷⁹ Apter, *Op. cit.*, p. 169; Cf. Irena Kristeva, *Pour comprendre la traduction* (Paris: Harmattan, 2009), pp. 65-70.

mondo circolano con il mio nome libri che non hanno niente a che fare con quello che ho scritto.’⁶⁸⁰ At the same time, he was convinced of the practical use of translation, of its importance for circulation, for fostering a less provincial authorial presence.⁶⁸¹ Moreover, he considered writing to be always a re-writing, a translation into words of the texture of the world – which means, in the final analysis, that every author is of necessity a mediator, a translator.⁶⁸² These convictions of Calvino are in line with what a well-known theorist on translation, Lawrence Venuti, has written: ‘Translation can be considered a form of authorship (...) redefined as derivative, not self-originating. Authorship is not *sui generis*, writing depends on pre-existing cultural materials, selected by the author, arranged in an order of priority, and rewritten (or elaborated) according to specific values’.⁶⁸³ In translation (theory) matters of authorship continually come to the surface, also in all the guises we have seen in earlier chapters, of ‘style’ and ‘coherence’ for example.⁶⁸⁴

Calvino was very much involved with translations and translators and, despite the occasional complaint of reviewers that something is ‘lost’ in translation, enough traces of the original Calvino seem to remain to be able to carve out a recognizable, distinctive voice in the Anglo-Saxon literary field.⁶⁸⁵ Calvino is distinctive, but not completely isolated: if he were too far removed from the core of Anglo-Saxon canons (plural), he would not have found his place, eccentric or distinctive as it may be. Calvino’s readings were certainly not restricted to texts in Italian, and this is

⁶⁸⁰ Calvino, *Lettere*, cit., p. 772; Cf. Claudia Nocentini, «Tradurre è il miglior modo di leggere un’opera»: Calvino e la traduzione’, in *Italia e Europa: dalla cultura nazionale all’interculturalismo: atti del XVI Congresso dell’A.I.P.I., Cracovia, 26-29 agosto 2004*, ed. by Bart van den Bossche et al. (Florence: Franco Cesati, 2006), pp. 229-35; Wilhelm, *Vermittler durch Verrat*, cit., p. 75.

⁶⁸¹ Cf. Federico Federici, *Translation as Stylistic Evolution: Italo Calvino Creative Translator of Raymond Queneau* (Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2009), pp. 29-40, 52, 63-65.

⁶⁸² Cf. Federici, *Translation as Stylistic Evolution*, cit., pp. 54; Sergio Cappello, *Les années parisiennes*, cit., pp. 157-64; Christine Baron, ‘Calvino/Queneau: de la traduction à l’écriture de la transhistoricité’, in *Frontières et passages: les échanges culturels et littéraires*, ed. by Chantal Foucrier and Daniel Mortier (Rouen: Publications de l’université de Rouen, 1999), pp. 91-98; Wilhelm, *Op. cit.*, pp. 186-97.

⁶⁸³ Lawrence Venuti, *The Scandals of Translation: Towards an Ethics of Difference* (London; New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 43.

⁶⁸⁴ Cf. Joseph Farrell, ‘The Style of Translation: Dialogue with the Author’, in *Voices in Translation: Bridging Cultural Divides*, ed. by Gunilla Anderman (Clevedon; Buffalo: Multilingual Matters, 2007), pp. 56-65; VV.AA., *La cohérence discursive à l’épreuve: traduction et homogénéisation*, ed. by Pascale Sardin, *Palimpsestes*, 26 (Paris: Presses Sorbonne nouvelle, 2013).

⁶⁸⁵ For Calvino’s involvement in the translations of his books cf. Di Nicola, ‘Il canone inverso’, pp. 79-82; Nocentini, «Tradurre è il miglior modo», cit., pp. 229-35; For some references to difficulties or imperfections in translating Calvino cf. Carne-Ross, *Op. cit.*; Lawrence Venuti, *Translation Changes Everything: Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 119-25; Ugo Varnai, ‘Meaning into Words’, *Times Literary Supplement*, 29 June 1984: 716.

transparent in his detailed discussion of the ‘impossible’ translation of Raymond Queneau’s fictional ‘Sally Mara’. Calvino writes: ‘Quindi noi di Sally possiamo far finta di tradurre non il francese, ma una pre-lingua che una volta scritta può essere tanto francese quanto inglese quanto italiano.’⁶⁸⁶ In a similar vein, he commented on Beppe Fenoglio’s ‘lingua mentale’, the strata of English that preceded Fenoglio’s Italian in many instances and the mental translation that was thus at the basis of Fenoglio’s writing.⁶⁸⁷ To a certain extent, Calvino’s own ‘inter-language’ gradually loses its more local, ‘sanremese’ traces and starts to welcome the foreign, which enters his fiction sometimes overtly (such as the ‘Big Bang’ in *Tutto in un punto*, or the ‘poubelle agréée’ of the story with the same title, or the ‘gorditas pellizcadas con manteca’ in *Sotto il sole giaguaro*), constituting little fragments that resist immediate translation, but, precisely for that reason, within the context of the respective stories become the prime locus where meaning is concentrated. Calvino’s international readings and the important part that intertextuality plays in his works, as well as his overt dialogue with (international) literary theory, provide further necessary footholds for non-Italian readers of his work.⁶⁸⁸ Moreover, it gives Calvino a privileged position to act as a *mediator*, a privileged portal one traverses in order to gain insight in Italian literature and culture.⁶⁸⁹ An example of this function as mediator are Calvino’s lessons about the essence (or lack of essence) of neorealism, which are almost always heeded by critics.

Calvino is clearly viewed as a non-parochial, ‘international’ writer: he figures prominently in the 1983 issue ‘Transcending Parochial National Literatures: Freedom and Fiction in Ten Contemporary Authors’ of the journal *World Literature Today*. As in other instances, one cannot disregard Calvino’s self-representation in this respect. He has declared frequently his ‘passione per una cultura globale’ propounding an ‘immagine di cultura come un tutto unitario’.⁶⁹⁰ In this fragment

⁶⁸⁶ Calvino, *Lettere*, cit., p. 864. Letter to Franco Quadri of 14 April 1965.

⁶⁸⁷ Maria Corti, *Beppe Fenoglio: storia di un “continuum” narrativo* (Padua: Liviana, 1980), pp. 24-25.

⁶⁸⁸ And here one might think of one of Calvino’s most successful sentences from the *Città invisibili*: ‘L’altrove è uno specchio in negativo. Il viaggiatore riconosce il poco che è suo, scoprendo il molto che non ha avuto e non avrà.’ Even in translation the first phrase of this passage has become a ‘travel apothegm’. Cf. Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan, *Tourists with Typewriters: Critical Reflections on Contemporary Travel Writing* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), p. 161.

⁶⁸⁹ Cf. Sara Maria Adler, *Calvino: The Writer as Fablemaker* (Potomac: José Porrúa Turanzas, 1979), pp. xiv-xv.

⁶⁹⁰ Calvino, *Eremita a Parigi*, cit., p. 163.

from *Autobiografia politica giovanile* we see that this openness of ‘culture’ in Calvino’s view referred to separate meanings of culture: that is, ‘universal’ in a spatial, geographical sense as well as all-encompassing (covering the different aspects of what we call ‘culture’). This cosmopolitan attitude is repeated by Calvino time and again, it is, one might say, a Calvinian dogma. However, there are peculiarities to this cosmopolitanism as well as – in a typical Calvinian fashion – conscious contradictions. Calvino often stressed the many places in which he lived, but he never really anchored himself to a place. ‘Sono nato a San Remo... sono tanto nato a San Remo che sono nato in America’ he answers in an interview to the rather straightforward question ‘Dove sei nato?’.⁶⁹¹ He called himself ‘forestiero a Torino’, ‘eremita a Parigi’: as in the aforementioned case of literary movements, Calvino never pertains to a place.⁶⁹² It is true that he referred to himself as ‘newyorkese’, but this represents a hardly veiled ambivalence, because New York has been a mental, ‘invisible’ city for most of Calvino’s life, a life he spent mostly elsewhere.⁶⁹³ He did not deny the irresolvable ambiguities in his markedly literary attitude to place and space, the universal and the local: ‘Di me potrebbero forse scoprire che sotto, gratta gratta, c’è il piccolo proprietario di campagna, l’individualista (...) che per reagire (...) al rimorso di aver lasciato la campagna in mano ai fittavoli, propone soluzioni universali alla sua crisi (...) la vita *déracinée* degli intellettuali cosmopoliti.’⁶⁹⁴ Not coincidentally, Borges is the prime example of a writer who has come to epitomize the worldly writer and the quintessentially Argentinian writer at the same time (in part by inventing a ‘new genre’, as Calvino himself has advocated).⁶⁹⁵

In an interview of 1978 with Guido Almansi, the transnational image of Calvino is clearly part of what is at stake. The negotiation around this transnational image causes some friction between Almansi and Calvino, for example when

⁶⁹¹ Calvino, *Sono nato*, cit., p. 279.

⁶⁹² ‘sono persuaso di essere in tutti i posti (...) Dove vivo? Ma a Torino e a Sanremo, a Roma e a Parigi (...) Alterno periodi in cui mi frantumano geograficamente a periodi in cui mi isolo.’ Ivi, p. 95, also pp. 217-18, 256-57, 294; Cf. also Giorgio Bertone, *Letteratura e paesaggio: liguri e no: Montale, Caproni, Calvino* (Lecce: Manni, 2001).

⁶⁹³ Cf. Calvino, *Sono nato*, cit., p. 222.

⁶⁹⁴ Calvino, *Saggi: Vol. 2*, pp. 2730; Cf. Francesco Biamonti, ‘Un ligure cosmopolita’, in *Italo Calvino, la letteratura, la scienza, la città: atti del convegno nazionale di studi di Sanremo*, ed. by Giorgio Bertone (Genova: Marietti, 1988), pp. 67-97; Sylvie Barral, ‘Le Paris d’Italo Calvino’, *Cahiers d’études romanes*, 6 (2001), 331-48.

⁶⁹⁵ Mads Rosendahl Thomsen, *Mapping World Literature: International Canonization and Transnational Literatures* (London; New York: Continuum, 2008), pp. 45-46; Jullien, ‘In Praise of Mistranslation’, cit.

Almansi tries to contextualize Calvino's 'place' by referring to Pavese, Vittorini and Gadda. Calvino (who seems to have shifted the focus away from these writers, especially the first two) reacts in a telling way: 'Questa intervista sta diventando troppo ristretta se non provinciale.'⁶⁹⁶ After a series of other questions and remarks (some of which concern Calvino's reception outside of Italy), Almansi ventures to ask directly about Calvino's 'italianità'. Calvino retorts: 'Non sono in esilio. L'Italia dista soltanto un'ora d'aereo da Parigi ed io passo il mio tempo più in Italia che in Francia.'⁶⁹⁷

In this interview Almansi clearly touched upon some sensitive or important issues. Even if it might seem a rather 'old-fashioned' debate, the matter of Calvino's 'Italianness', despite (or partially because of) his unequivocal first name, has been much referred to and has frequently resurfaced (even if often in a somewhat concealed manner) in evaluations of the Ligurian writer's value. On a more general level, Emily Apter has stressed the less immediately obvious, discursive side of the symbolic coins of 'cosmopolitanism' and 'cities' to which intellectual identities are frequently tied in the quest for a less provincial presence. Both terms, used to focalize attention on certain topics, tend to connote a way of being in the world that is considered as enlightened, secular, but also, frequently, as fundamentally depoliticized, anonymizing 'economic power and social coercion'.⁶⁹⁸ This suspicion certainly has echoes in Calvino criticism. Calvino's Parisian years and connections, the idea that he was an adept of Borges, his interest in Anglo-Saxon literature, all (and especially when considered accumulatively) have contributed to an idea of him as an 'un-Italian' writer. Especially his *Oulipo* period has been construed as a 'betrayal of his "italianità"'.⁶⁹⁹ The 'anti-Calvinists' in the infamous issue of *Wimbledon* in 1990 tended to concur on the fact that the less convincing Calvino was without a shadow of a doubt the Parisian one. Nonetheless, Claudio Milanini suggests that what was initially seen as a problem is potentially exactly the reason for Calvino's success over time:

egli è stato a lungo come un *outsider*, come una figura anomala nel nostro panorama letterario. Ma proprio questa sua anomalia, questa sua apparente eccentricità, rivela

⁶⁹⁶ Almansi, 'Intervista a Calvino', cit., p. 390; Calvino repeated this refrain very often in interviews: cf. Calvino, *Sono nato*, cit., pp. 59-60, 144, 147, 154-55, 176, 179, 385.

⁶⁹⁷ Ivi, p. 404.

⁶⁹⁸ Apter, *Op. cit.*, p. 41.

⁶⁹⁹ Botta, 'Calvino and the Oulipo', cit., pp. 82-83.

ormai d'essere il segno d'appartenenza piena a una comunità più vasta, travalicante i confini nazionali. Solo quando gli studi di letteratura comparata avranno uno sviluppo adeguato, diventerà possibile collocare un'esperienza narrativa tanto complessa in una cornice soddisfacente.⁷⁰⁰

Whereas Milanini calls Calvino's eccentricity 'apparente', his belonging to a bigger, transnational community is considered 'piena'. In other words: he is *both* Italian and universal. Another important 'calviniano', Marco Belpoliti, stresses the same eccentric position of Calvino somewhat more strongly: 'da 'cosmopolita' guarda alla letteratura italiana come 'terra incognita' inventandosi un canone da sé'.⁷⁰¹ For Belpoliti, Calvino's eccentricity was functional, it allowed him to adopt a different viewpoint (like his own Cosimo, one might add) and *invent* a new canon. The choice of words is significant here: by writing that Calvino 'invents' a canon, Belpoliti makes clear that before Calvino this canon did not exist as such. Calvino's 'foreignness' allows him to trace a new line in the Italian literary tradition, a sort of *corpus alienum*. These authors (Leopardi for instance) as a consequence belong to a sort of no-man's land: the no-man's land of all classics, one might deduce.

However, this no-man's land does not exist, at least not in a uniform way, and is consequently often contested. Among Calvino's more critical Italian followers, there is a shared problematization of his 'foreignness'. Goffredo Fofi, for example, explains that 'un'altra – non piccola – diffidenza nei confronti di Calvino nasceva almeno in me dalla completa «settentrionalità» di Calvino, dal suo essere ligure-torinese-parigino, un po' spaventato da quella che egli chiamava la «melassa di umanità». Il Sud, infine (anche quello emigrato nel Nord).'⁷⁰² Fofi's example does seem to exacerbate precisely the North-South divide he claims to challenge. Moreover his 'ligure-torinese-parigino' is not very precise. Nevertheless, even if Fofi's statement is, avowedly, based mostly on 'diffidence' instead of proof, it interestingly rests on an idea of a fairly 'provincial' Calvino, who universalizes his 'Nordic' nature, a suspicious, almost imperial act. Pier Paolo Pasolini has voiced a similar criticism on his 'Western' counterpart (Pasolini's Friuli, like Calvino's Sanremo is in the North but literally marginal in Italian topography), with an important distinction, since he shifts attention towards language and its implications. In the 'rapporto di Calvino con l'italiano medio' according to Pasolini, 'C'è

⁷⁰⁰ Milanini, *L'utopia discontinua*, cit., p. 8.

⁷⁰¹ Belpoliti, *Settanta*, cit., p. 125.

⁷⁰² Fofi, *Op. cit.*, p. 174.

un'accettazione della normatività, e un'assunzione di essa su un reticolato di tipo europeo specialmente francese: e tutto ciò è reso possibile dal distacco ironico.⁷⁰³

Calvino himself, again, did confess this openly, turning the possible reproach on its head and making the absence of dialect and spoken Italian a positive factor, a logical off-shoot of his cosmopolitan environment: 'Oggi in famiglia mia moglie mi parla nello spagnolo del Rio de la Plata e mia figlia nel francese delle scolaresche popolari parigine: la lingua in cui scrivo non ha più nulla a che fare con alcun parlato, tranne che attraverso la memoria.'⁷⁰⁴

Suddenly, Calvino's style is again at the forefront of attention. As suggested earlier on in this thesis, there seems to be a discrepancy between the form and the content of Calvino's works, a discrepancy that effectively conceals a hidden, more dramatic and fluid core as in Pirandello's famous distinction between *forma* and *vita*.⁷⁰⁵ Calvino's exemplary clarity has its shadow-side, at least one can gather this from the phrasings with which (Italian) critics write about his language. Vittorio Coletti, in describing Calvino's language, writes about 'codici e registri lessicali diversi e spesso divergenti, compensati da una sintassi molto calcolata, di ineccepibile grammaticalità.'⁷⁰⁶ There is thus a sense of variety and difference, which is however *compensated* by calculation, and faultless grammar.⁷⁰⁷ 'Grammar', with its anchor in rules and its slightly insipid perfection, is mentioned remarkably often when Calvino's writing is discussed. In this respect, the inclusion of Calvino as linguist in the *Lexicon grammaticorum* by a distinguished linguist like Tullio de Mauro is symbolic.⁷⁰⁸ Giorgio Terrone mentions Calvino's 'grammatica normativa', his ability to 'organizzare un proprio codice grammaticale', as well as his 'ammirabile sapienza grammaticale' and (significantly) stresses the difference between a 'precarietà tematizzata ed una precarietà mostrata': precisely the language

⁷⁰³ Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Saggi sulla letteratura e sull'arte* (Milan: Mondadori, 1999), p. 1251; Cf. Benvenuto Terracini's comment of 1965: 'da Dante, da Manzoni, a D'Annunzio a Pirandello è scritto che quando uno scrittore italiano disserta sulla 'questione della lingua' più o meno apertamente esponga e difenda l'ideale del proprio stile. Ne ha dato ultimamente un candidissimo esempio Calvino', cit. in Federici, *Translation*, cit., p. 72.

⁷⁰⁴ Calvino, *Eremita a Parigi*, p. 187; Cf. Arturo Tosi, *Language and Society in a Changing Italy* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2001), p. 257.

⁷⁰⁵ Cf. also Bruno Falcetto, 'La tensione dell'esistenza: vitalismo e razionalità in Calvino dal *Sentiero* allo *Scrutatore*', *Nuova corrente: Italo Calvino*, 1 (1987), 29-56.

⁷⁰⁶ Vittorio Coletti, 'L'italiano di Italo Calvino', *Nuova corrente: Italo Calvino*, 2 (1987), 283-96, p. 295.

⁷⁰⁷ Cf. Testa, *Lo stile semplice*, cit., pp. 240, 242, 286.

⁷⁰⁸ Cf. Harro Stammerjohann et al. (eds.), *Lexicon Grammaticorum: Who's Who in the History of Linguistics* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1996), p. 157.

decides, in the view of Terrone, if the precariousness is real or not.⁷⁰⁹ Without *mimicking* chaos, one does not really describe it according to the underlying contention. Ideas of measure, ‘middle-of-the-roadness’, code and order almost monopolize descriptions of Calvino’s language. Vittorio Spinazzola points towards a ‘norma di medietà prosastica’, an ‘ordinamento sintattico’ and a ‘maestria’ which is ‘simmetricamente proporzionato’ by a ‘senso della misura’ and ‘sorveglianza’.⁷¹⁰

Spinazzola’s much-cited essay portrays Calvino as ‘diviso’ along multiple lines, one of them being the chasm between control and chaos, a fissure that represents both a language divide and a psychological double-sidedness. Spinazzola is not unique in this respect, the wordings that critics use betray that Calvino himself, as a person with a well-defined psychological profile is never far away in discussions about his linguistic specificity. ‘La grammatica del suo fantasticare’ causes Calvino to hide imperfections, even if he amply shows doubts, a fruitful (if still fairly unexplored) terrain for psycho-analytic critics.⁷¹¹ Belpoliti suggests that Calvino’s use of images allows him to ‘rappresentare in modo simmetrico ciò che nel senso è dissimetrico’.⁷¹² Once again, the contrast between a troubled meaning and a crystalline language is underlined, and Belpoliti’s use of the word ‘immagine’, probably one of Calvino’s most beloved words, is not coincidental: the precision of the language translates into a neatly delineated image. This was already recognized by Franco Petroni in 1976, when he referred to the: ‘dominio dello stile, per cui la frase definisce esattamente l’immagine senza approssimazioni e spezzature; una esatta, «classica» misura narrativa Calvino l’ha raggiunta su base riduttiva’.⁷¹³ The ‘reduction’ – in a measured precision without rupture – that Petroni mentions contains the seed of the criticism that Calvino would see flower (or fester) in later years. Arguably, this part of Calvino’s image can be lost in translation, when Calvino’s books are read out of (linguistic) context.

⁷⁰⁹ Giorgio Terrone, ‘Dentro e fuori il linguaggio: la grammatica normativa di Calvino’, *Nuova corrente: Italo Calvino*, 2 (1987), 355-62, p. 361.

⁷¹⁰ Spinazzola, ‘L’io diviso’, cit., p. 90.

⁷¹¹ I borrowed the phrase ‘la grammatica del suo fantasticare’ from: Laura Guglielmi (ed.), *Dal fondo dell’opaco Io scrivo: Calvino, da Sanremo a New York = From the depths of the opaque I write: Calvino, from Sanremo to New York* (Bordighera: De Ferrari, 1999), p. 39; For the psycho-analytic interest, cf. Barbara Spackman, ‘Calvino’s Non-Knowledge’, *Romance Studies*, 26.1 (2008), 7-19.

⁷¹² Belpoliti, *L’occhio di Calvino*, cit., p. 60.

⁷¹³ Petroni, ‘Italo Calvino’, cit., pp. 66, 98.

Calvino has talked frequently of the painstaking process of writing, of the mountains of ink and corrections that his deceptively clear and ‘simple’ phrases gloss over. The struggle is thus seen in the process (at least when disclosed or hinted at), but hardly in the end product, with its clear-cut form and materiality (the book). This may be a reason for the evermore wide-spread critical fascination with Calvino’s ‘minor texts’, such as *La poubelle agréée* (in which the theme of ‘waste’ includes also the writing process) as well as of unfinished projects such as *Alì Babà* or the intriguing ‘sixth memo’. Imperfection brings us closer to the ‘real’ Calvino (just like Pasolini’s ‘impure’ language is a sign of his personal presence in his writing), and this is even true in the case of material that Calvino *did* publish: more imperfect writing still seems to mean more personal writing for some critics. When Marilyn Schneider calls *Il castello dei destini incrociati* Calvino’s ‘most personal book’, she does so after explaining that the ‘struggle in subject’ is to be seen in the ‘very language of the text’ which ‘battles itself in a violent admixture of conflicting modes of expression’.⁷¹⁴ A visibly embattled style is thus considered to reflect a more complex, contradictory – as well as personal – content, whereas clear language (as a consequence) projects well-defined thoughts more directly.⁷¹⁵ Whereas Schneider thinks that *Il castello* is Calvino’s most personal book, for most critics precisely the unresolved entanglement in the stylistic features does not remind of Calvino at all, is far removed from his ‘authentic’ voice. Something similar is to be seen in the reception of *La giornata di uno scrutatore*, which if it were ‘un’opera anonima (...) sulla base dello stile (...) forse il nome di Calvino non verrebbe fatto immediatamente’. Even though this is true (it does not seem written in Calvino’s ‘limpid’ style), Roberta Favia argues that the poetics behind these different styles is still one and the same, it remains coherent.⁷¹⁶ Again, the reason for this is that the book is a product of a crisis and, accordingly, requires a less limpid style.⁷¹⁷ The repercussions for a book like *Palomar* (with its much more concise, precise language) seem clear following the same logic based on its linguistic features: it will not equally be a product of a crisis, at least not of a personal involvement in that crisis. Discrepancy between form and content has proved destabilizing for many critics,

⁷¹⁴ Marilyn Schneider, ‘Calvino at a Crossroads: *Il castello dei destini incrociati*’, *PMLA*, 95.1 (1980), 73-90, pp. 73-74

⁷¹⁵ Cf. Roberta Favia, ‘Il linguaggio del mondo senza parole: una proposta di lettura de *La giornata di uno scrutatore* di Italo Calvino’, *Critica letteraria*, 140 (2008), 557-79, p. 558.

⁷¹⁶ Favia, ‘Il linguaggio del mondo’, cit., p. 557.

⁷¹⁷ Cf. Calvino, *Sono nato*, cit., pp. 95-97; Asor Rosa, *Stile Calvino*, cit., pp. 32-33.

whereas Asor Rosa has argued that precisely herein lies a distinctive quality of Calvino, because there is no 'rapporto necessitante' between 'pensiero e stile' in his works: 'La stessa cosa, insomma, si può dire in modi diversi'.⁷¹⁸

Among those who have openly lamented the Parisian influences on Calvino are Pier Paolo Pasolini and Franco Fortini. Both seem to suggest a loss of content in favor of mannerisms, of French 'fashion'. Pasolini, for example apostrophizes Calvino: 'e con lui tutta l'ala francesizzante-razionalistica'.⁷¹⁹ 'Francesizzante' suggests taking on a French taste which does not really belong to the person. Giovanni Raboni, whose criticism was – in general – very openly construed as a challenging of canons, wrote along similar lines 'che un buon scrittore, ossessionato dall'idea di diventare un grande scrittore, finisce finalmente con l'occultare o perdere o comunque tradire l'ispirazione e le doti che ne facevano un buon scrittore'. In Calvino's case this was aimed at becoming 'uno scrittore "internazionale", uno scrittore d'esportazione. Calvino si è infatti radicalmente riprogrammato (...) la gloria gli ha arriso, sia in Italia che all'estero, esattamente nei tempi, nei modi e per le ragioni che aveva previsto.'⁷²⁰ Not only does the well-known image of Calvino the 'arch-programmer' return forcefully in this description, Raboni states in an unveiled manner that Calvino 're-programmed' himself as an international (the Calvino 'franchise' not just being 'Frenchish') writer, losing his 'true' inspiration.⁷²¹

If Calvino is 'betraying' his 'italianità', the *Lezioni* or *Six memos* which he was supposed to deliver to an American audience and which have often been construed as a testament seem a likely candidate for re-negotiation of his transnational identity. The allegations of shallowness that have been formulated in various guises (by Alessia Ricciardi and Claudio Giunta for example) point to this unease with such an 'extraneous' product of one of Italy's most esteemed writers. The concrete (American) context in which the *Lezioni* were supposed to be delivered points to this, as does the fact that many of Calvino's notes are written directly in

⁷¹⁸ Asor Rosa, *Stile Calvino*, cit., pp. 42-43.

⁷¹⁹ Pasolini, *Saggi sulla letteratura*, cit., p. 1293; Cf. Franco Fortini, *Un giorno o l'altro* (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2006), pp. 507-10.

⁷²⁰ Giovanni Raboni, 'Rimpianto per un bravo scrittore tradito dalla gloria', *Corriere della Sera*, 12 September 1993.

⁷²¹ Cf. Mengaldo who writes about *Collezione di sabbia*, that he would have liked less 'conclusioni alla francese sul vuoto, l'assenza, il nulla': Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo, 'Il sistema Calvino: fantasie del vuoto in Collezione di sabbia (1984)', in *La tradizione del Novecento: terza serie* (Turin: Einaudi, 1991), pp. 293-97, p. 297.

English, part of the ‘lingua mentale’ that accompanies, and intermingles with, Calvino’s Italian. The Italian title directly points to the ‘American’ nature of the lectures, but this was not Calvino’s but Pietro Citati’s idea.⁷²² Mario Barengi agrees that the *Lezioni* were written for another audience, ‘più ampio’, but for him this does not necessarily mean an *American* audience: in general, when the label ‘americanità’ is used, it is in a depreciative way.⁷²³ Andrea Cortellessa, on his part, has argued that the memos are ‘nient’affatto usoformi e normative come, più o meno in buona fede, equivocando generalmente, sono state interpretate’ and that they have become a lens through which to simplify Calvino. Part of this simplification is in fact, according to Cortellessa, the perceived ‘americanità’ of the *Lezioni*.⁷²⁴ Other critics have uttered a different view on the *Lezioni*, among them the recent remarkable contribution by Gabriele Pedullà, who calls it (very much against the grain) Calvino’s ‘testamento politico’.⁷²⁵ If the *Lezioni* are American, they have to be so in style and not as much in content, because (as Giorgio Bertone has rightly pointed out) the American writers who have inspired Calvino in different ways throughout his career are almost completely absent from the long ‘chaotic enumeration’ of names.⁷²⁶

In order to fully appreciate the ‘Italianness’ of Calvino, non-Italian audiences can provide an interesting counterpoint. Rebecca West, in her article on the American identity of Calvino, presents a rather strong statement when she writes that ‘in certo qual modo Calvino fu importato e venduto in America alla stessa stregua di molta cultura italiana: come l’archetipo stesso dell’“italianità” vale a dire: infantilismo, spensieratezza e divertimento.’⁷²⁷ If this were true, it becomes easier (too easy?) to dismiss Calvino’s *Lezioni* as a response to a different readership that expects ‘entertainment’ from him. Critics who have extensively examined Calvino’s stance with respect to America conclude that he judged American literature to be interesting mostly for sociological reasons, not so much for their literary value. His tastes and judgements were fairly similar to those of important Italian

⁷²² Cf. Asor Rosa, *Stile Calvino*, cit., pp. 65-66.

⁷²³ Mario Barengi, ‘Calvino un bilancio’, cit; Cf. section 2.3.

⁷²⁴ Cortellessa, *Libri segreti*, cit., pp. 318, 320.

⁷²⁵ Gabriele Pedullà, ‘The Dark Side of the Memos: il testamento politico di Italo Calvino’, on <http://www.leparoleelecose.it/?p=20316> (19 September 2015).

⁷²⁶ Bertone, *Italo Calvino*, cit., p. 110.

⁷²⁷ West, ‘L’identità americana’, cit., p. 370; This is, of course, an inversion of the ‘infantile’ American ‘science-fiction’ mentality from an Italian perspective which was singled out in section 3.1.

Americanists.⁷²⁸ Some critics have lamented Calvino's superficial view of American culture as a whole, whereas others present a more positive opinion on his various American diaries.⁷²⁹ As will be seen in the next section, a 'ludic' Calvino has tended to dominate especially the panorama of American literary criticism.

Few English-language monographs directly address the matter of Calvino's 'Italianness'. Nevertheless, the consistency with which Calvino is mostly compared with non-Italian writers like Borges – for example by scholars such as Beno Weiss – unquestionably means a move away from the Italian context. Angela Jeannet responds to this state of affairs:

It has been said that Italo Calvino is not an 'Italian' writer (...) To the contrary, he is very Italian, if that attribute means to have been nourished by a literary tradition that includes continuous attention to French- and English-language cultures, and if it means to believe that only the very controlled linguistic medium used by literature can adequately express a fundamental doubt, and by expressing it hope to dominate it.⁷³⁰

Many nodes of what has been discussed come to the surface in Jeannet's passage. She mentions Calvino's *controlled* use of language, which can serve to *dominate* a doubt. But there is also a paradox which shows that Jeannet fundamentally strives to subtly challenge national identity as univocal essence that one can easily pinpoint: she locates Calvino's Italianness in his openness to other (Western) cultures. The paradox that Calvino himself sustained throughout his career is mirrored by Jeannet, who consistently compares him with Montale (another cosmopolitan Ligurian), arguing that they are 'both very Italian but also very cosmopolitan writers'.⁷³¹ At the same time it is clear that Calvino for Jeannet is markedly 'other' and this otherness is a somewhat loosely constructed Italianness that is bound to a constellation of names, most importantly Montale. In Jeannet's view, Calvino's coherence and originality (the combination which is so immensely important in canon-formation) spring from and feed upon a whole Italian tradition.⁷³²

⁷²⁸ Castellucci, *Un modo di stare al mondo*, cit., pp. 190, 192; Cf. 'I beatniks e il «sistema»', in Calvino, *Una pietra sopra*, cit., pp. 96-104; Calvino, *Sono nato*, cit., p. 71.

⁷²⁹ Cf. the negative appraisal of Beynet with the more positive one of Marazzi: Michel Beynet, 'Calvino en Amérique: "Tutto il mondo è paese?"', *Italies*, 1 (1997), 237-56 <<http://italies.revues.org/3397?lang=en>> [accessed 8 March 2016]; Martino Marazzi, *Little America: gli Stati Uniti e gli scrittori italiani del Novecento* (Milan: Marcos y Marcos, 1997), pp. 134-35.

⁷³⁰ Jeannet, *Under the Radiant Sun*, cit., p. 5.

⁷³¹ Idem; Cf. Calvino's letter to John Woodhouse of 5 April 1967: Calvino, *Lettere*, cit., pp. 947-53.

⁷³² Jeannet, *Under the Radiant Sun*, cit., p. 25.

Calvino's emblematic function for non-Italian readers has emerged clearly from this thesis. Nevertheless, West's contention that he represents only 'infantilismo' might be approximately true for a roughly sketched response in America at a specific moment in time, but can certainly not be extended to all forms of Anglo-Saxon circulation in their dispersed and diachronic complexity. Occasionally, shockingly stereotypical readings highlight the 'Italo' in Calvino, such as when John Domini presents a curious compound of sensuality and Fibonacci in the *Città invisibili* as evidence of a nostalgia for Italy and 'italianità' on Calvino's part.⁷³³ However, probably Zygmunt Baranski comes closer to hitting the mark when he writes that 'è proprio la tematica non-italiana di Calvino e di Levi che ci aiuta a capire il loro successo britannico'. Baranski also calls Calvino a 'scrittore modernissimo' who ties in with more international concerns such as magical realism and metaliterature.⁷³⁴ Calvino openly strived to this modernity, also linguistically, by generally privileging transmissibility and translatability over linguistic rootedness.⁷³⁵

Completely different 'Calvini' have emerged with time, versions of Calvino that do not simply follow the lines of Italian debates, but at the same time do often interlace with those debates. As we will see in more detail in the last section of this chapter, Calvino has been a central figure in (mostly British) interpretations of the role of *impegno* in Italian literature after the Second World War. In the *Very Short Introduction to Italian Literature*, Calvino is in fact called 'the writer who most represents the travails of *impegno* and its eventual abandonment'.⁷³⁶ A writer who always searched for margins without stepping over them towards something completely different is the perfect candidate for an eccentric, side-ways look on historical events and literary movements. In the very midst of a shifting *impegno* landscape, Barilli judged this aspect of Calvino's personality somewhat more negatively: 'non riusciva mai a essere completamente sincronizzato rispetto alla materia via via assunta, ma denunciava nei suoi confronti un vistoso margine di disincanto, di lontananza. In altre parole, Calvino passava indenne da una situazione

⁷³³ John Domini, 'Chessboard and Cornucopia: Forty Years of Invisible Cities: A Look2 Essay', *Ploughshares*, 40.1 (2014), 193-204, p. 201.

⁷³⁴ Zygmunt Barański, 'La diffusione della letteratura italiana contemporanea in Gran Bretagna', *The Italianist*, 13 (1993), 255-65, p. 258; Calvino's perceived closeness to the rather vague 'genre' of magical realism is a potentially revealing topic that, for reasons of concision, cannot be addressed in this thesis.

⁷³⁵ Cf. Federici, *Translation*, cit., pp. 237-47.

⁷³⁶ Peter Hainsworth and David Robey, *A Very Short Introduction to Italian Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 77.

all'altra, appunto, per il fatto di non volersi identificare per intero'.⁷³⁷ Nevertheless, this privileged position of 'barone Calvino' has been judged predominantly in an appreciative manner from the viewpoint of Anglo-Saxon critics. Because of this different appraisal of *impegno* and marginality, even Palomar can become 'an emblematic figure of recent Italian fiction'.⁷³⁸ This more positive appreciation of Calvino's *impegno* creates an image that Andrea Cortellessa would be likely to approve: 'un po' diverso da quello oggi demonizzato come emblema di letterato spensieratamente e deresponsabilizzatamente autoreferenziale.'⁷³⁹ First, however, the more 'infantile', fantastic Calvino deserves some extra attention, through a more concrete exploration of Anglo-Saxon (mostly American) responses to Calvino's works at various moments in his career.

⁷³⁷ Barilli, *La barriera del naturalismo*, cit., p. 308; Cf. Asor Rosa's *mea culpa* for not having understood, at the time, Calvino's unique brand of 'impegno': Asor Rosa, *Stile Calvino*, cit., p. vii.

⁷³⁸ Smyth, *Op. cit.*, p. 76.

⁷³⁹ Cortellessa, *Libri segreti*, cit., p. 295.

4.2 English and American circulation: fantastic games of a writer's favourite

Until 1962, English translations of Calvino's works preceded American ones.⁷⁴⁰ Early anthologies that include Calvino are often published by English publishing houses.⁷⁴¹ After 1962, American translations started to appear before the English ones and the change is indicative of a shift in attention: whereas Calvino slowly starts to find an American audience, the English attention, both of a broader public and in literary criticism, is less strong.⁷⁴² The first English language monograph dedicated to Calvino does come from an English scholar, John Woodhouse, whose volume appeared in 1968, only a year after the first Italian-language monograph of Pescio Bottino.⁷⁴³ Nonetheless, quiet decades follow and Gore Vidal even somewhat sneeringly writes: 'By 1985, except for England, Calvino was read wherever books are read.'⁷⁴⁴ Calvino, 'lettore onnivoro in lingua inglese, aveva letto più letteratura anglo-americana di tutti i maggiori italiani del Novecento', has had to content himself with a relatively late development of similar interest the other way around.⁷⁴⁵ However, from the 1990s onwards writers have started to be compared to or declare their admiration for Calvino, writers such as Jeanette Winterson, Angela Carter, A.S. Byatt and David Mitchell. Not coincidentally – as we will see in the next section – authors with a more or less pronounced feminist agenda dominate this list.⁷⁴⁶ Winterson, it should be added (anticipating later discussions), thought that what Calvino's male-centred fiction lacked were credible female characters. Interestingly, Guido Bonsaver, in an article about the similarities between Calvino and Winterson, opens by stating that a comparison with Pasolini would seemingly be more logical, considering the 'contradictory mixture of social commitment, open sexuality and

⁷⁴⁰ Laura Di Nicola, 'Italo Calvino negli alfabeti del mondo: un firmamento sterminato di caratteri sovrasta i continenti', in *Bologna: la cultura italiana e le letterature straniere e moderne*, cit., pp. 129-44, p. 136.

⁷⁴¹ Cf. John Lehmann, *Italian Stories of Today* (London: Faber & Faber, 1959); Raleigh Trevelyan, *Italian Short Stories: racconti italiani* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965); Cf. however also Marc Slonim, *Modern Italian Short Stories* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1954).

⁷⁴² West, 'L'identità americana di Calvino', cit., p. 367; Guido Almansi, 'Intervista a Italo Calvino', cit., p. 406.

⁷⁴³ J.R. Woodhouse, *Italo Calvino: a Reappraisal and an Appreciation of the Trilogy* (Hull: University of Hull, 1968).

⁷⁴⁴ Gore Vidal, 'On Italo Calvino', *The New York Review of Books* November 21, 1985.

⁷⁴⁵ Rocco Capozzi, 'Cosmicomiche vecchie e nuove', cit., p. 66. Cf. Zygmunt Barański, 'La diffusione della letteratura italiana', cit., pp. 256, 258, 260; Guarnieri, Giulia, 'La cultura anglofona nell'opera di Italo Calvino', *Forum Italicum*, 45.1 (2011), 138-64.

⁷⁴⁶ The American authors Ursula K. Le Guin and Cynthia Ozick could be added to this list.

religious anguish' that links Winterson to the Friulan writer.⁷⁴⁷ Implicitly stated are thus the 'missing' qualities in Calvino: commitment, sexuality, religion.

Because of this late development of serious attention for Italo Calvino in the United Kingdom the reactions with respect to his work do not crystallize into recognizable patterns until fairly late. In 1984 Richard Andrews writes:

Nobody, in any case, would be rash enough to draw final conclusions about watersheds or the lack of them in Calvino's literary development (...) better simply to await with confidence Calvino's next proof of his ability to confound expectations (...) the essential image of him remains the one he created for himself, that of the 'solitary who did not avoid people' in *Il barone rampante*.⁷⁴⁸

The watersheds would however soon be drawn very clearly and after his death Calvino's ability to confound expectations has often be interpreted negatively, as a sort of (in itself predictable) neurosis. The 'essential image' that Andrews indicates is nonetheless significant, not only because Calvino himself proposes it, but also since it foreshadows an important point of attention in English criticism, *impegnò*, which will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

A very appealing 'essential image' of Calvino had presented itself with the publication of *Palomar*. 'But Calvino was not Palomar', one reads on the very first page of Albert Howard Carter's 1987 study, *Italo Calvino: Metamorphoses of Fantasy*.⁷⁴⁹ Towards the end of the book, he declares that it is a 'critical blind alley to make Palomar and Calvino into the same person.'⁷⁵⁰ Other American critics offer similar statements in these years.⁷⁵¹ Part of the reason for the refusal of a 'Palomarization' of Calvino may lie in the American tradition of considering Calvino as a fantastic writer.⁷⁵² A writer of fantasy, whom moreover is characterized by continuous metamorphoses (as Carter's title tells us), does not necessarily correspond with a 'Palomarian', scientific figure. Occasionally, references to Calvino as a

⁷⁴⁷ Guido Bonsaver, 'Cities of the Imagination: Traces of Italo Calvino in Jeanette Winterson's Fiction', *The Italianist*, 15 (1995), 213-30, p. 213.

⁷⁴⁸ Richard Andrews, 'Italo Calvino', in *Writers and Society in Contemporary Italy*, ed. by Michael Caesar and Peter Hainsworth (Leamington Spa: Berg, 1984), pp. 259-81, pp. 278-79.

⁷⁴⁹ Carter, *Metamorphoses of Fantasy*, cit., p. 1.

⁷⁵⁰ Ivi, p. 167.

⁷⁵¹ JoAnn Cannon, 'Calvino's Latest Challenge to the Labyrinth: a Reading of *Palomar*', *Italica*, 62.3 (1985), 189-200, pp. 197-98; John Hannay, 'Description as Science and Art: Calvino's Narrative of Observation', *Mosaic*, 21.4 (1988), 73-86.

⁷⁵² Sharon Wood voices a similar position from an English perspective, claiming that *Palomar* is 'less a mask than a method'. Cf. Sharon Wood, 'The Reflections of Mr Palomar and Mr Cogito: Italo Calvino and Zbigniew Herbert', *MLN*, 109.1 (January 1994), 128-41.

‘scientist’, a ‘Palomar’ or even ‘Monsieur Teste’ are to be found, but they are not predominant.⁷⁵³ In articles that are exclusively on *Palomar* a tendency in highlighting the merely descriptive Palomar of the oft-cited opening story *Lettura di un onda* is evident also in Anglo-Saxon criticism.⁷⁵⁴ However, on the other hand there is also a ‘Chaplinesque’ Palomar, who is read more in the line of Marcovaldo than as a human telescope.⁷⁵⁵ Eugenio Bolongaro has underlined the distance of Calvino as author from Palomar, stressing the fact that not only does Calvino’s irony strike Palomar, he even lets the protagonist pass away in the end, which Bolongaro takes to mean a rather straightforward dismissal of a type of intellectual.⁷⁵⁶ In his volume on Calvino, Bolongaro presents a similar argument about Amerigo Ormea, the protagonist of *La giornata d’uno scrutatore*. Through these characters Calvino presents a stringent criticism of a type of being intellectual, as well as of (an earlier version of) himself.⁷⁵⁷

In earlier American criticism, Calvino is a fable maker and even an ‘adventurer’, as we can gather from Sara Maria Adler’s 1979 monograph *Calvino: the Writer as Fablemaker*: ‘Rather than carefully planning out the themes he will use for his stories he takes his chances, letting the ideas that have inspired him evolve freely in his mind.’ This is rather far from the Italian image of Calvino, and even warrants an explanation in the introduction from Dante Della Terza, who stresses that ‘adventurer’ should not be read in a pejorative, ‘Italian’ sense.⁷⁵⁸ It is the ‘journey’ that counts in Calvino, not the map.⁷⁵⁹ Thus, when Adler heads a section of her volume ‘Weary Traveller or Spirited Adventurer?’, the question is rhetorical: clearly she proposes the second reading. But in the year of the publication of *Se una notte*, many Italian critics would probably tend towards the first option.⁷⁶⁰ A more tragic, cynical, nihilistic Calvino, who more and more uses concepts of ‘vuoto’ and ‘nulla’

⁷⁵³ Cf. Rosetta Di Pace-Jordan, ‘Italo Calvino’s Legacy: The Constant and Consistent Vision’, *World Literature Today: A Literary Quarterly of the University of Oklahoma*, 66.3 (1992), 468-71.

⁷⁵⁴ Cf. Gerhard van der Linde, ‘Notes on Calvino’s ‘Lettura di un onda’’, *Italian Quarterly* 30.115-116(1989), 75-80; Albert Devivo, ‘Calvino’s Palomar and Deconstruction: Similarities and Differences’, *Italian Quarterly*, 30.115-116 (1989), 81-91.

⁷⁵⁵ Hannay, ‘Description as Science and Art’, cit., p. 79.

⁷⁵⁶ Bolongaro, ‘Italo Calvino and the Role of the Intellectual’, cit., p. 124.

⁷⁵⁷ Bolongaro, *Italo Calvino and the Compass*, cit., pp. 166-67, 186; Cf. Roberta Favia, ‘Il linguaggio del mondo senza parole’, cit., 557-79.

⁷⁵⁸ Adler, *Calvino: the Writer as Fablemaker*, cit., pp. 1, xv-xvi.

⁷⁵⁹ Cf. Markey, *Op. cit.*

⁷⁶⁰ Adler, *Op. cit.*, pp. 139-145.

in his works, is proposed by Franco Ricci a couple of years later, but does not provoke many echoes.⁷⁶¹

The overall appraisal of Calvino has been very positive, in the Anglo-Saxon literary panorama he can be reckoned among the canonized foreign authors. This favourable reaction notwithstanding, the occasional opponents of Calvino give a privileged insight into the reasons for Calvino's prominent position in the transnational literary pantheon. In a remarkably critical piece after Calvino's death, James Gardner (without a solid argumentation) blames Calvino for his fame:

in a sense, he could not help responding, especially later on, to the applause that he was receiving from all sides, and since he might have been tempted by this enthusiasm to provide his glamorous public with exactly what it wanted, in order to win still more applause, is it not possible that that adoring and insincere public has participated in neutralizing a great talent?⁷⁶²

Gardner insinuates far more than he proves, but there is a remarkable similarity to complaints of, for example, Giovanni Raboni and Franco Fortini. What Gardner seems to reproach Calvino mostly for, however, is lack of consistency to be more than superficially scientific, or to write a *proper* novel.⁷⁶³ Analogously, a 'Benedetti-like' turmoil followed the publication of an article by Tom Wolfe, who – like Gardner – preached for the return of the (realist) American novel and for a shedding of the foreign influences of Calvino, Borges, Marquez, Kafka and others. His was an attack on the fantastic and *thus* on Calvino.⁷⁶⁴

To appreciate the canonization of Calvino as a fantastic author and as a *storyteller* more than as a novelist it is important to recall that the *Cosmicomiche* were the first Calvinian comet to really make an impact on American readers: 'in parte perché le prime opere che ebbero successo in America (...) erano "fantastiche", in parte perché esse furono lette soprattutto da giovani (...) il nome di Calvino si trovò spesso associato a quelli di Tolkien, Asimov, Le Guin, e di altri autori di *fantasy* particolarmente amati dagli studenti.'⁷⁶⁵ The consequences of such a reading

⁷⁶¹ Franco Ricci, 'Palomar by Italo Calvino', cit.; Franco Ricci, 'Introversion and Effacement in I racconti of Italo Calvino', *Italica*, 63.4 (1986), 331-45.

⁷⁶² James Gardner, 'Italo Calvino 1923-1985', *The New Criterion*, 4.4 (1985), 6-13, p. 13.

⁷⁶³ For the question of Calvino and the novel in Italian criticism, cf. Linda Pennings, *Polemiche novecentesche, tra letteratura e musica, romanzo, melodramma, prosa d'arte* (Florence: Franco Cesati, 2009), pp. 105-21.

⁷⁶⁴ Tom Wolfe, 'Stalking the Billion-Footed Beast', *Harper's Magazine* (November 1989), 45-56.

⁷⁶⁵ West, 'L'identità americana di Calvino', cit., p. 368; Cf. Calvino, *Sono nato*, cit., p. 149.

are not limited to the proposition of alternative Calvinis, they resonate with the image of Calvino in a broader sense: 'Letto al di fuori di ogni contesto, - sia quello della produzione complessiva, sia quello della letteratura e cultura italiane contemporanee -, l'opera di Calvino ha assunto, fra il pubblico non specializzato di questo paese, una "identità americana" che potrà forse sorprendere i suoi critici e lettori italiani.'⁷⁶⁶ Calvino himself knew this perfectly well and suggests this reading to Rebecca West and myself.⁷⁶⁷

The danger of a reading of Calvino out of context is a very real one. This becomes clear from the many curiously atemporal considerations of Calvino's authorial trajectory, especially through the lens of the categories of the *Lezioni americane*. Stephen Chubb, for example, reads the selves of Calvino's books from the viewpoint of the *Lezioni americane* and *Il mare dell'oggettività*, resolving seeming paradoxes with the aid of other essays such as *La sfida al labirinto*. In this way he creates a Calvino who is necessarily always in agreement with himself.⁷⁶⁸ Sara Maria Adler's book is advocated in the introduction precisely by saying that it is 'circular, not linear, synchronic rather than diachronic'.⁷⁶⁹ JoAnn Cannon, after realizing that she used 'Calvino's texts as a vehicle (...) a pre-text for my own critical discourse' added a chapter on Calvino's first books, precisely to avoid the almost irresistible typecasting of Calvino as a wholly fantastic, game-playing writer.⁷⁷⁰

Another intriguing example of such an 'inversion' with respect to the Italian reception is a review in the *Times Literary Supplement* by Thomas Sutcliffe of 22 September 1983. Commenting upon the (very belated) publication of *Adam, One Afternoon and other stories* and *Marcovaldo*, Sutcliffe concludes that, although they present an 'intriguing flashback for his readers', Calvino comes out as not quite fantastic enough yet, deprived of the real inventiveness that he displays at a later

⁷⁶⁶ Ivi, p. 367. This is also true for generational differences in reception, cf. Barengi, 'Calvino un bilancio', cit., p. 1.

⁷⁶⁷ Calvino, *Eremita a Parigi*, cit., p. 262: 'Certo l'immagine dello scrittore cambia perché in Italia uno è visto per tutto l'insieme delle sue attività, nel contesto di una cultura fatta di tante cose (...) mentre all'estero sono solo i libri tradotti che arrivano come dei meteoriti, attraverso i quali critici e pubblico devono farsi un'idea del pianeta da cui si sono staccati.' Cf. footnote 678 in section 4.1.

⁷⁶⁸ Cf. Chubb, *Op. cit.*

⁷⁶⁹ Adler, *Op. cit.*, p. xvi; Cf. 'the present study is emphatically non-chronological (...) it concentrates on the fantastic structures underlying Calvino's imagination', Hume, *Calvino's Fictions*, cit., p. 2, also p. 4.

⁷⁷⁰ Cannon, *Italo Calvino*, cit., p. 11; Cf. Teresa De Lauretis, 'Semiotic Models: Invisible Cities', *Yale Italian Studies*, 2 (1978), 13-37, p. 13; Jennifer Burns, *Fragments of Impegno: Interpretations of Commitment in Contemporary Italian Narrative, 1980-2000* (Leeds: Northern Universities Press, 2001), p. 16.

stage in his career.⁷⁷¹ Kathryn Hume similarly argues that Calvino finds his true voice only with the *Cosmicomiche* and Kerstin Pilz, who dedicates her book mostly to Calvino's post-1963 works (even though she states that 'any attempt to divide his oeuvre into different periods runs the risk of establishing artificial lines of demarcation'), some twenty pages later talks precisely of the *Cosmicomiche* as 'demarcation line' between Calvino's 'early works (...) and his mature works'. The term 'mature' is telling: after all, Calvino was already 40 years old at the time of the 'watershed'.⁷⁷² This is a mirror-image of the many critics in Italy who have lamented Calvino's move *away* from realism. Some critics have explicitly addressed this 'postmodern bias', as Bolongaro calls it: Lucia Re, for example, writes against the perceived 'discontinuity' – more ironically 'the great leap forward' – between the neorealist and the fantastic or metafictional writer, which she ends up reinforcing nonetheless when she claims to present 'another Calvino'.⁷⁷³ Clearly, as intimated in section 1.2, a writer of two phases almost inevitably becomes a writer of two faces.⁷⁷⁴

Seemingly, this creation of a specifically American Calvino did not regard the Cuba-born author himself. However, as we have seen, Calvino followed the reception of his works outside of Italy with great attention, scrutinizing and criticizing publishers and translators alike. An interesting testimony to this is a letter of Calvino on 11 March 1968, addressed to Helen Wolff of the American publisher Harcourt Brace & World:

Se io volevo dare la precedenza alle *short stories* era per un motivo preciso: negli Stati Uniti io sono conosciuto soprattutto per le mie narrazioni di fantasia, e nelle *short stories* il lettore non si allontana troppo dal clima di fantasia che già conosce (...) insomma qualsiasi lettore può riconoscere il mio stile.⁷⁷⁵

Calvino thus actively responded to his American audience, choosing to present the *Cosmicomiche*, which (as explored in chapter three) go on to resonate strongly with

⁷⁷¹ Thomas Sutcliffe, 'Before the Art of Cunning', *Times Literary Supplement*, 22 September 1983: 921.

⁷⁷² Hume, *Calvino's Fictions*, cit., p. 101, also p. 3; Pilz, *Op. cit.*, pp. 4, 23; This critical splitting of a 'young' and a 'mature' Calvino runs parallel to Calvino's attitude in declaring himself, from 1969 onwards, all of a sudden 'old' in order to have a longer old age: cf. Calvino, *Sono nato*, cit., pp. 146, 155, 157, 191.

⁷⁷³ Lucia Re, *Calvino and the Age of Neorealism: Fables of Estrangement* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).

⁷⁷⁴ Cf. the author that is 'profondamente scisso' of Asor Rosa and the article of Vittorio Spinazzola: Asor Rosa, *Stile Calvino*, cit., p. 6; Spinazzola, 'L'io diviso', cit.

⁷⁷⁵ Calvino, *Lettere*, cit., p. 994.

certain strands in American literature at the time. The double-edged (s)word ‘style’ – denoting both distinction and belonging – symbolically closes Calvino’s sentence. Calvino goes on to compare the American response to the situation in France, where his *La giornata d’uno scrutatore* met with only very modest success. Moreover, he stresses that also in Italy he has more success – at least, in terms of readership – with his fantastic works.⁷⁷⁶ This last distinction is important: Calvino differentiates between the ‘average reader’ and the critics, the first being more attuned to his fantastic works, whereas the second group tends to be more critical towards these publications. Hence, in a sense Calvino makes a conscious choice in favour of recognizability and readership: the translations of *La giornata d’uno scrutatore*, *La nuvola di smog* and *La formica argentina* only appear in 1971 on the American market, after the *Cosmicomiche* (1968) and *T con zero* (1969).⁷⁷⁷ Another significant difference with Calvino’s Italian presence is the essay-collection *The Uses of Literature*, which in 1986 (under a markedly different, more ‘manualistic’ title) presents a selection of essays from *Una pietra sopra*, excluding precisely the more ‘committed’ essays of the 1950s and the 1960s.⁷⁷⁸

In a similar way, the fact that Calvino more or less presented himself to an American audience long before anyone else publishes a sustained comment on the Ligurian author is rarely mentioned. Calvino’s trip to America is famous, but the way in which he presented himself remains relatively unscrutinized. In 1960, Calvino’s talk ‘Main Currents in Italian Fiction Today’ was published, and Calvino subtly enters the stage as author-critic. He is introduced as having won the Viareggio and Bagutta prizes, and as ‘one of the best and most industrious contemporary Italian novelists’.⁷⁷⁹ Thereafter, Calvino presents an ‘objective’ panorama of contemporary Italian fiction, not excluding himself in the process: he stresses that he does not belong to a school of literature, but more to a general climate or epoch, in which Pavese and Vittorini paved the way for other writers. The blueprint of the famous 1964 preface is already mapped out in this paper.⁷⁸⁰ Significantly, Calvino closes his

⁷⁷⁶ Ivi, p. 995.

⁷⁷⁷ Interestingly, in 1963 Calvino commented on *La giornata* in terms of translatability, writing: ‘forse non lo tradurranno nemmeno, così italiano com’è.’ Cf. Calvino, *Sono nato*, cit., p. 98, as well as p. 124.

⁷⁷⁸ Cf. Bolongaro, *Italo Calvino and the Compass*, cit. p. 10

⁷⁷⁹ Literary prizes are often mentioned especially in (Anglo-Saxon) biographical sections on Calvino.

⁷⁸⁰ Italo Calvino, ‘Main Currents in Italian Fiction Today’, *Italian Quarterly*, 4.13-14 (1960), 3-14, pp. 3-5.

talk by suggesting a move from Hemingway to Ariosto, therefore already presenting himself with his 'patron' Ariosto to whom he will be very frequently compared later in Anglo-Saxon criticism as well.⁷⁸¹ Several articles of Calvino start to be published from 1967 onwards, first in the *Times Literary Supplement*, then in *Twentieth Century Studies* as well as in a volume by Raymond Federman about 'surfiction' in 1975.⁷⁸²

A decade later, but in the same journal (*Twentieth Century Studies*), Nicholas De Mara will echo the statements from Calvino's *Main Currents*, delineating how Calvino distances himself from Hemingway and neorealism through his use of fantasy 'thereby creating a work characteristic of the immediate post-war era, and yet one which is distinctively his own'.⁷⁸³ This quality to create works that are 'distinctively his own' derives not from his being oblivious to other writers (on the contrary), but more from his ability to 'outgrow' influence (something that, with time, he would probably have done as well even with Borges). Another example of this is the way in which Conrad disappears from the radar: his absence in the 1964 preface is remarkable considering the importance of Conrad in the beginning of Calvino's career.⁷⁸⁴ Critics, most notably Martin McLaughlin, have proceeded to 'unearth' this somewhat forgotten but crucial influence on Calvino.⁷⁸⁵ Since Calvino himself was always prepared to repeat his explanations, his preface to *Il sentiero* is not an isolated instance: specifically for an English audience, he retells the story of his departure from neorealism and 'proper' realist novels in a preface for *Our Ancestors*.⁷⁸⁶

Calvino himself was not the only writer to be involved in the process of sculpting his reputation and image for an American audience: other writers have been crucial promoters of Calvino's work. Gore Vidal in 1974 was the first 'big name' to write an appreciative piece on Calvino in the *New York Review of Books*.⁷⁸⁷

⁷⁸¹ Calvino, 'Main Currents', cit., pp. 13-14

⁷⁸² Cf. bibliography for full publication details.

⁷⁸³ Nicholas De Mara, 'Pathway to Calvino: Fantasy and Reality in *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno*', *Italian Quarterly*, 55 (1971), 25-49, p. 43.

⁷⁸⁴ Maria José Calvo Montoro, 'Joseph Conrad/Italo Calvino: o della stesura di una tesi come riflessione sulla scrittura', *Forum Italicum*, 31.1 (1997), 74-115, p. 84.

⁷⁸⁵ Cf. Martin McLaughlin and Arianna Scicutella, 'Calvino e Conrad: dalla tesi di laurea alle *Lezioni americane*', *Italian Studies*, 57 (2002), 113-32; McLaughlin, *Italo Calvino*, cit.

⁷⁸⁶ Italo Calvino, *Our Ancestors* (London: Secker&Warburg, 1980), p. vii.

⁷⁸⁷ Gore Vidal, 'Fabulous Calvino', cit.

Rebecca West stresses the importance of this promotion (also by others such as John Updike, who in 1981 called Calvino an important Nobel-prize candidate), as well as the crucial role of William Weaver, Calvino's translator of almost all books from the *Cosmicomics* onwards.⁷⁸⁸ One should add here that Weaver received the *National Book Award* for Translation for his *Cosmicomics*. Undoubtedly, this will have helped establish a larger visibility for the book. JoAnn Cannon marks 1978 as a turning point, as the moment when also non-Italianists started to pay more sustained attention to Italo Calvino.⁷⁸⁹

So well-known writers were among the first to applaud Calvino and support his 'candidature' to a broader canon, with the *Città invisibili* and the *Lezioni americane* as two important milestones.⁷⁹⁰ Other writers include most famously Salman Rusdhe and Seamus Heaney, but also John Barth, Donald Barthelme and (more recently) Jonathan Lethem. Critics followed soon and provided arguments for their advocacy of Calvino's books. The 'service' is returned by Calvino, who in an interview in 1978 besides Nabokov names Updike, Vidal, Barth and Barthelme as good American writers.⁷⁹¹ The arguments of these writers present an important constant: they stress both Calvino's versatility of style and wealth of invention, but at the same time praise his coherence in theme and 'semantic content'.⁷⁹² Also according to American literary critics Calvino invents his own genre, becomes a 'paradigm', is unconventional, innovative, *but* at the same time he is considered the most important 'heir' of Borges.⁷⁹³ This contradiction between originality and his being an alleged member of a Borgesian line is not the only unresolved paradox. Calvino is also, according to I.T. Olken, 'topical and timeless', 'insular and universal, traditional and modern', as well as 'antiparochial and eclectic' with a 'particular sensitivity to the new'.⁷⁹⁴ Apart from a certain preference for the paradox in the reasoning of literary critics that has arguably been spread as a style through the

⁷⁸⁸ West, 'L'identità americana', cit., pp. 365-66; Cf. John Updike, *Hugging the Shore: Essays and Criticism* (London: André Deutsch, 1984).

⁷⁸⁹ Cannon, *Italo Calvino*, cit., p. 83.

⁷⁹⁰ Capozzi, *Tra Eco e Calvino*, cit., p. 9; Cf. Domini, 'Chessboard and Cornucopia', cit., pp. 194, 196.

⁷⁹¹ Almansi, *Op. cit.*, p. 384.

⁷⁹² Cf. Teresa De Lauretis, 'Narrative Discourse in Calvino: Praxis or Poiesis?', *PMLA*, 90:3 (1975), 414-25, pp. 414-15.

⁷⁹³ Domini, *Op. cit.*, pp. 194-95; Beno Weiss, 'Palomar y el pathos de la distancia de Calvino', in *Italo Calvino: nuevas visiones*, cit., pp. 119-33, p. 119.

⁷⁹⁴ I.T. Olken, *With Pleated Eye and Garnet Wing: Symmetries of Italo Calvino* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1984), pp. 3, 13.

influence of New Criticism and further solidified by Paul de Man and Jacques Derrida (most notably), this frequent reasoning by paradox also points to the ambivalence that is characteristic of critical evaluations of canonized authors, who tend to be ‘in between’, ‘neither’, and – as a consequence – more complex and interesting.⁷⁹⁵

The idea that Borges and Calvino are ‘unique together’ has been discussed already in section 2.3 with reference to Harold Bloom, who has done much to spread Calvino’s reputation as a ‘genius’ and affirm his canonization. The presence of a ‘didactic, multifunctional Calvino’ continues to exist, a fact that

is reflected in the number of courses outside Italian studies in which his works are taught. In settings as diverse as literary courses in Romance languages, comparative literature courses, and seminars in architecture, Calvino has become a touchstone for instructors interested in the panoptic nature of his work and the ever-expanding purview of his thought.⁷⁹⁶

Apart from the telling word-choice of Ricci (‘panoptic’), this quote warrants a doubt: might it be that in many universities Calvino is not or hardly taught in Italian Studies but mostly in other departments? In any case, it is highly unlikely that Calvino is still often studied *as a whole*, outside of Italian Studies he is of necessity studied in parts, and thus in a certain sense instrumentalized. This can in fact be read between the lines of Ricci’s further statements: ‘I was impressed by the variety of non-Italian courses that *include* Calvino on their syllabi. Many are courses in creative writing, but others are undergraduate courses on translation, literary criticism, architecture, ethics and world literature.’ Calvino’s exemplary style and clarity are clearly appreciated, considering his frequent inclusion in courses of creative writing. Ricci goes on to explain that Calvino mostly figures as a ‘*touchstone*, an excellent *way of introducing* larger literary problems that span cultures and epochs and *provide material for* common philosophical, cognitive, epistemological, and theoretical issues.’⁷⁹⁷ Many different Calvini are created as a consequence, parts without a whole except for the authorial image that binds them.⁷⁹⁸

⁷⁹⁵ Cf. Paul Stevens, ‘The Political Ways of Paradox: Renaissance Literature and Modern Criticism’, *English Literary Renaissance*, 26.2 (1996), 203-24.

⁷⁹⁶ Ricci, *Approaches to Teaching*, cit., p. 17.

⁷⁹⁷ Ivi, p. 19. Italics mine.

⁷⁹⁸ Cf. for Calvino’s presence at schools in Italy (albeit somewhat outdated by now): Paola Giovanetti, ‘Calvino, la scuola, l’editoria scolastica: l’idillio dimezzato’, in *Calvino & l’editoria*, cit., pp. 35-82. Calvino’s presence at Italian universities is an even more unexplored and potentially interesting topic.

The appreciation of Calvino is thus (at least) twofold: the precise, geometrical Calvino who ‘teaches’ is certainly part of the American panorama, but the strong presence of the ‘fantasy-Calvino’ cannot be denied. The combination proves to be a very powerful one, Calvino has an unmistakable ‘style’ also for Americans: the Calvino Prize of the English Department of the University of Louisville for instance is rewarded to ‘outstanding pieces of fiction in the fabulist experimentalist style of Italo Calvino’.⁷⁹⁹ Imagination is often foregrounded instead of objectivity, Calvino does not coincide with or teleologically develop towards Palomar, instead the ‘blueprint’ of Calvino is often found in his project on the *Fiabe* and his explanation of their importance.⁸⁰⁰ As Sara Maria Adler writes: ‘the key to a comprehensive perspective of Calvino lies in the fact that he portrays the world around him in the same way it is portrayed in the traditional folktale.’⁸⁰¹ Calvino himself already concluded during his visit to America that ‘le *Italian Fables* ci sono dappertutto anche perché entrano nei children’s’, thus suggesting at least a side door through which he has entered the (sub)conscious of the American audience even before the *Cosmicomiche*.⁸⁰²

In a certain sense, one could speak of a ‘ricezione capovolta’, as Rebecca West points out with regard to the reception of Calvino’s later works in America: ‘ora in America lo si accusò di aver abbandonato la buona e solida *fantasy* per un tipo di narrativa astrusa e cerebrale, eccessivamente accademica.’⁸⁰³ The somewhat whimsical, eccentric side to Calvino, his ‘otherness’, combined with his reputation as a central figure of postmodernism, as inventor of a new type of literature together with Borges, as modern classic with a recognizable voice, together make for a multifunctional Calvino, who can be called upon to solidify theories about topics ranging from literature and science to reading and writing as well as a whole host of authors: ‘Calvino’s curiosity and versatility make his works a valuable textual resource for scholars, because he provides examples that enrich all sides of the debate over changing concepts of literary language.’⁸⁰⁴ These ‘misreadings’ – since they do not address the whole Calvino – can produce and have engendered various

⁷⁹⁹ Cf. <http://louisville.edu/english/creative-writing/contests>

⁸⁰⁰ Cf. for example Adler, *Op. cit.*, pp. 9, 10, 124.

⁸⁰¹ Ivi, p. 121.

⁸⁰² Calvino, *Eremita a Parigi*, cit., p. 30.

⁸⁰³ West, ‘L’identità americana’, cit., p. 371.

⁸⁰⁴ Jeannet, *Under the Radiant Sun*, p. xix.

alternative Calvini, of which the science fiction Calvino was only one illustration, an example upon which the next section expands.

4.3 Calvino between impegno, science, animal studies, environmental studies, posthumanism and feminism

In Italy, the debate around Calvino's *impegno* was indissolubly bound to his (perceived) move away from (neo)realism towards a fantastic type of literature, as well as – in a broader perspective – his move away from politics and the PCI in particular.⁸⁰⁵ Among those who agreed with Calvino that *impegno* should not mean adherence to a specific ideology we find an otherwise not too 'pro-Calvinist' critic like Renato Barilli.⁸⁰⁶ Amongst the chorus of critics who are disappointed by Calvino's fantastic works, others state (with Calvino) that his writing may be fantastic, but not therefore far removed from reality.⁸⁰⁷ Donnarumma has echoed these statements more recently, not without reason quoting Roland Barthes: 'Essere scrittore equivale a credere che in qualche modo il contenuto dipende dalla forma, e che lavorando e modificando le strutture della forma si finisca per produrre una particolare intelligenza delle cose, un taglio originale della realtà, in breve un senso nuovo.'⁸⁰⁸ As we have seen in the first chapter, this combination of the form of writing ('style') and the content was stressed time and again by Calvino in those years. Tellingly, Calvino wanted to emphasise this aspect as well in the editorial accompaniment to English publications of his work. Regarding the English publication of the *Barone rampante* in 1959, he writes in a letter to his publishing agent Erich Linder: 'Spero che la critica non si fermerà a considerare il libro come una favola estetizzante ma ne vedrà il valore moderno, e la personale interpretazione polemica del concetto dell'*homme engagé*. In questo senso forse sarebbe stato opportuno orientare la presentazione editoriale.' Linder does not agree, precisely for cultural reasons, underscoring that Calvino's line of argument is 'quanto più lontano si possa immaginare dalla mentalità inglese'.⁸⁰⁹

⁸⁰⁵ Cf. Sandro de Nobile, *Lettere e carri armati: Quattro scrittori, «Il contemporaneo», il 1956* (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2013), pp. 169-222.

⁸⁰⁶ Barilli, *La barriera del naturalismo*, cit., p. 218. Cf. Belpoliti, *Settanta*, cit., p. 106.

⁸⁰⁷ Cf. for an example of the first: Franco Petroni, 'Italo Calvino: dall'«impegno»', cit.; For the opposite contention, cf. Giorgio Pullini, *Il romanzo italiano del dopoguerra (1940-1960), con bibliografia 1940-1970* (Padova: Marsilio, 1970), pp. 173, 339, 359; Sergio Pautasso, 'Favola, allegoria, utopia', cit., pp. 81-91.

⁸⁰⁸ Raffaele Donnarumma, *Da lontano*, cit., p. 70.

⁸⁰⁹ Cit. in Giorgio Alberti, 'Tra nazionale e transnazionale: il ruolo dell'agente letterario Erich Linder nella carriera di due autori-editori', in *Bologna: la cultura italiana*, cit., pp. 101-9, pp. 106-7; For a similar case in the French reception, cf. Calvino's letter to François Wahl in 1961 about the French translation of *Il cavaliere inesistente*: Calvino, *Lettere*, cit., p. 684.

In the English debate around Calvino's *impegno*, the figure of the baron in the trees certainly has a central place, and the reading of the baron's (and, as a consequence, Calvino's) engagement with the 'terran' community has been predominantly positive. Calvino himself partly engaged through his editorial presence. Having some sort of editorial presence has been both productive and (potentially) problematic for several generations of writer-editors that have failed to adequately address this peculiar position:

In effetti, focalizzare la situazione dell'intellettuale inserito nel sistema dell'editoria significava porre in crisi la figura tradizionale del letterato umanista, come cultore di un'attività eminentemente disinteressata, dettata solo dalla propria vocazione artistica. E a venir disturbata era anche l'immagine parallela del letterato *engagé*, volto a conciliare le ragioni dell'arte con quelle dell'ideologia, ma sempre su un piano di disinteresse assoluto.⁸¹⁰

Calvino viewed his editorial presence as a possibility of positive contribution to the direction of Italian culture. To say that he did not problematize his position is to deny the fact that problematizing the way of being an editor is potentially also an indirect challenging of the role of the intellectual editor *per se*. In a passage from a letter in which Calvino *does* consider explicitly his particular position, acknowledging that (like many of his generation) apart from an author he is also an editor, he concludes: 'cioè sono uno che lavora (oltre che ai propri libri) a far sì che la cultura del suo tempo abbia un volto piuttosto che un altro'.⁸¹¹ Nevertheless, it is true that Calvino's reflections upon his role as intellectual usually regard more his intellectual *style* than the precise nature of his activities. This may have contributed to critics conceiving his characters as stylizations of his mode of being an intellectual (a possibility that Calvino never denied). Eugenio Bolongaro, for example, goes a long way towards effacing the boundaries between the 'mondo scritto' and the 'mondo non scritto' when he traces Calvino's 'intellectual biography' through three key moments: *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno*, *La giornata d'uno scrutatore* and *Palomar*.⁸¹² The implicit argument is that Calvino's intellectual journey can be traced in his books, which offer emblemata for the role of the intellectual with respect to society.

⁸¹⁰ Clerici and Falcetto, *Calvino & l'editoria*, cit., p. xii; Cf. Vincenzo Bagnoli, 'Dall'alto e dal margine: Italo Calvino, Roberto Roversi e la polis', in *La sfida della letteratura: scrittori e poteri nell'Italia del Novecento*, ed. by Neil Novello (Rome: Carocci, 2004), pp. 195-213, p. 198; Antonello, *Dimenticare Pasolini*, cit., p. 50.

⁸¹¹ Italo Calvino, *I libri degli altri: lettere, 1947-1981* (Turin: Einaudi, 1991), p. 465.

⁸¹² Bolongaro, 'Italo Calvino and the Role of the Intellectual', cit., p. 116.

The 'style' of Calvino's commitment is one we have encountered already in many forms and shapes: privileging detachment above solidarity, representing an ironic presence, effacing the 'I', adopting 'lo sguardo dall'alto'.⁸¹³ Calvino's intellectual style has been pitted time and again against Pasolini's, to the point that the comparison is clear even when it remains unstated: 'Per far questo non ebbe bisogno di indossare la maschera del melanconico; non gli fu necessario posare a denunciato indignato. Gli bastò impiegare con discernimento quel fondo di silenzio e di riserbo nel quale si approssimava alle sue fonti.' From this derived his 'irritazione nei confronti della letteratura di denuncia e di quella in cui la personalità che si mette in mostra ingombra abusivamente tutta la scena'.⁸¹⁴ These quotes derive from the introduction to the *Romanzi e racconti*, not to the *saggi*: the figure of the intellectual Calvino is easily 'extracted' from his fiction.

Almost every article on Calvino in Anglo-saxon criticism in the 1970s and 1980s highlights the seeming paradox between fantasy and commitment in Calvino's work, ultimately resolving the disparity along the lines proposed by Calvino.⁸¹⁵ Salman Rushdie held a similar opinion: even though he calls Calvino a 'fantasist', he insists that his fantasy is 'not escapism': 'I can think of no finer writer to have beside me while Italy explodes, while Britain burns, while the world ends.'⁸¹⁶ Umberto Eco contributed to this idea by choosing Calvino's baron as the image of the model intellectual, detached but nonetheless committed.⁸¹⁷ But the one to propose such a reading most forcefully was Calvino himself, not only famously in his 1964 preface to *Il sentiero*, but also in a lecture written for a symposium at Amherst College on (European) politics in 1976, as well as in interviews: 'è così [come il barone] che vorrei vedere l'intellettuale impegnato'.⁸¹⁸

⁸¹³ Calvino, *Romanzi e racconti: vol. 1*, cit., pp. xxii-xxiii.

⁸¹⁴ Ivi, pp. xx, xxvii.

⁸¹⁵ Cf. J.R. Woodhouse, 'Fantasy, Alienation and the *Racconti*', cit.; JoAnn Cannon, 'Literary Signification: An Analysis of Calvino's Trilogy', *Symposium*, 34 (1980), 3-12; Cannon, *Italo Calvino*, cit., p. 12.

⁸¹⁶ Salman Rushdie, 'Calvino', *London Review of Books*, 3.17 (1981), 16-17.

⁸¹⁷ Umberto Eco, 'Aerial Maneuvers', *PEN America: a Journal for Writers and Readers*, 1.1 (2000), 53-56; Cf. Paulicelli, 'Dalla città invisibile alla città futura', cit., pp. 148-49; Cannon, *Postmodern Italian Fiction*, cit., pp. 24, 33-34; Weiss, *Understanding Italo Calvino*, cit., p. 51; Capozzi, 'Cosmicomiche vecchie e nuove', cit., p. 66.

⁸¹⁸ Calvino, *Sono nato*, cit. p. 48, but also pp. 47, 98, 106, 119; Cf. Cannon, *Italo Calvino*, cit., p. 37; Roberto Bertoni, *Int'abrigu int'ubagu*, cit., p. 65; Burns, *Fragments of Impegno*, cit., pp. 31, 51; Cf. also Calvino, *Eremita a Parigi*, cit., p. 170.

From an Italian context, the shift to a more ‘Pasolinian’ ideal of *impegno* in the 1990s arguably turned Calvino again into a somewhat disputable figure in this respect. The English evaluation of Calvino’s *impegno* tends to be markedly more positive, since Calvino is considered to be emblematic for the development of *impegno* in Italy, at the starting point of several veins of *impegno* that cut like subterranean rivers through the landscape of literature in the decades following Calvino’s death.⁸¹⁹ Several phases have been recognized in Calvino’s commitment as a writer, phases that do not follow the 1964 fault line but tend to focus on other moments in Calvino’s career, such as 1957 (the year that he leaves the PCI) and his literary production following this. Another example is the unrealized *Alì Babà* project, which has received a remarkable amount of critical attention. This attention can partially be explained as an attempt to ‘fill the gaps’ in Calvino’s silence, to bridge his physical distance in the Parisian years, to explain that his *impegno* takes on new shapes but does not dissipate. Hence, *seen* in this light *Alì Babà* becomes a sort of workshop to mould a new kind of *impegno*, and its interlocutors, most notably Gianni Celati, have been recognized as lasting influences on Calvino’s intellectual trajectory.⁸²⁰ Although certain books remain privileged instances of Calvino’s exemplary *impegno*, ‘even’ *Palomar* and the *Lezioni*, which often have been read as anything but involvement in the matters of the world, have been presented as tracing the outlines of a new, different, more personal form of *impegno*.⁸²¹ Calvino’s *impegno* takes on new shades and shapes, problematically and self-critically following the transformation from ‘letterato intellettuale’ to an ‘impegno mediato’ (or, as Mario Barenghi puts it, from ‘intellettuale militante’ to ‘grande firma’).⁸²²

Hence, the general idea is that Calvino has grown with society, that his personal trajectory embodies a broader one of Italian culture at large: ‘Despite the clear limitations inherent in viewing the course of *impegno* through the lens of one writer, this text [*Una pietra sopra*] offers a valuable means of navigating changing

⁸¹⁹ Burns, *Fragments of Impegno*, cit., pp. 14, 57-58.

⁸²⁰ Cf. Mario Barenghi and Marco Belpoliti (eds.), *Alì Babà: progetto di una rivista, 1968-1972* (Milan: Marcos y Marcos, 1998); Monica Francioso, ‘Impegno and Alì Babà’, pp. 107-8.

⁸²¹ Cf. Paulicelli, Op. Cit., pp. 143-44, 154-55; Burns, *Fragments of Impegno*, cit., p. 47; Modena, ‘Italo Calvino e la saggistica del magma’, cit.; Antonello, *Il ménage*, cit., p. 183.

⁸²² Vincenzo Bagnoli, ‘Dall’alto e dal margine’, cit., pp. 195, 208-9; Mario Barenghi, ‘Congetture su un dissenso’, in *Alì Babà*, cit., pp. 13-23, p. 14; Cf. Antonello, *Dimenticare Pasolini*, cit., pp. 11, 62, 89; Spinazzola, ‘L’io diviso’, cit., pp. 104, 109; Asor Rosa, *Stile Calvino*, cit., p. 58.

attitudes towards socio-political engagement.⁸²³ Calvino's personal redefinition becomes thus an effective revisioning of a whole period of cultural debate. Calvino is the eye in the storm, he who remains coherent and recognizable when everything around him changes.⁸²⁴ Even though 'limited', the source is nonetheless essential, as it contains the nucleus of a development that saw Calvino famously at the margins. The margin rewrites the centre once more, the footnote becomes the core text. Or, as Calvino himself put it: 'Gli irregolari, gli eccentrici, gli atipici finiscono per rivelarsi le figure più rappresentative del loro tempo.'⁸²⁵

Part of the reason for this exemplary function is, arguably, the stylization by Calvino of his own trajectory, the continuous connection he teases out between form and life, the abstract and the material, metaphor and reality, contours and enfleshments, the precise and the iconic. In a schematic rendition of the differences between Vittorini, Calvino and Pasolini, Jennifer Burns baptizes Pasolini as the 'stylistician' of the three.⁸²⁶ This is an interesting, challenging choice, because it inverts the usual image of Pasolini as the most 'political' one. However, depending on the exact reading of the term 'stylistician', there is a very good argument to be made for the fact that the model of both Pasolini and Calvino has been so effective because of the fact that they have equally (albeit in different ways) been able to give a style to their intellectual presence, which binds words to world. It is no coincidence that Eco's 1962 article 'Del modo di formare come impegno sulla realtà' provoked an enthusiastic response of Calvino, who – as we have seen in earlier chapters – also stressed the way in which a style of writing and an intellectual style combined in the case of his (partial) masters, Pavese and Vittorini. When one closely reads Burns' book, she seems to implicitly agree with such an interpretation, since she writes about a Calvinian *impegno* which 'finds its origin and its *shape* in fictional narrative', argues that Calvino is 'contributing to the discussion *in a different language* from that used in the mainstream *impegno* debate', recognizes the importance of metaphors in Calvino's essays such as *Il mare dell'oggettività* and

⁸²³ Elizabeth Wren-Owens, *Postmodern Ethics*, cit., p. 9.

⁸²⁴ Cf. Bresciani Califano, who writes about the 'linea ininterrotta di coerenza (...) ciò che viene mutando è il mondo intorno a lui': Mimma Bresciani Califano, *Uno spazio senza miti: scienza e letteratura: quattro saggi su Italo Calvino* (Florence: Le lettere, 1993) p. 101; Cf. also Bolongaro, *Italo Calvino and the Compass*, cit., p. 9, as well as section 1.3 of this thesis.

⁸²⁵ Cit. in: Calvino, *Eremita a Parigi*, cit., p. 258.

⁸²⁶ Burns, *Fragments of Impegno*, cit., pp. 15-16; In this schematic comparison Vittorini is the 'strategist', Calvino the 'creator'.

points out that, at a later stage, being a ‘fine literary technician’, Calvino advises younger writers about the ‘written expression of their ideas, rather than about subject matter or ideological stance’.⁸²⁷

As part of Calvino’s new form of *impegno* Burns points at his scientific methodology of constant self-testing.⁸²⁸ Calvino’s opening up to science has been praised in other instances, and his ‘scientific’ approach and lucid observations have been seen as a form of *impegno* also by certain Italian scholars.⁸²⁹ Intriguingly, Pierpaolo Antonello – who comes from an Italian academic context but has moved to Stanford for a significant period before coming to Cambridge, and who has strong interest in the crossroads between literature and science – in arguing for a form of *impegno* that is open to societal and technological changes, mentions Calvino as a positive example of an intellectual who tries to redefine *impegno*.⁸³⁰

Calvino has clearly transcended the boundaries of the merely literary, entering in different curricula at universities, as well as in a wide array of volumes from disciplines that range from architecture to philosophy. Calvino’s increasing interest in different branches of science forms a clear grounding of his transnational profile, of the way in which he has managed to bridge different *cultures*. The fact that Calvino’s scientific interests received a crucial incentive from his long visit to America in 1959 and 1960 (as well as from his well-known assiduous reading of the *Scientific American*) in itself signifies the ‘universal’ roots of those scientific interests.⁸³¹ Calvino has therefore been championed in Italy as an intellectual who, alongside the central figure of Elio Vittorini, tried to overcome the divide between the two cultures as mapped out and challenged by Charles Percy Snow in 1959.⁸³² In spite of this, Calvino’s stance was arguably not without contradictions: Paola Govoni has claimed that the writer himself contributed to the ‘two cultures idea’ by telling half-truths about his family: ‘Per porre una distanza tra sé e la generazione dei genitori (...) Italo Calvino ha utilizzato uno strumento di facile gestione emotiva e

⁸²⁷ Ivi, pp. 21-22, 51. Italics are mine. Cf. Bolongaro’s contention that the ‘ethico-political tension remains fundamental to the author’s style’, Bolongaro, *Italo Calvino and the Compass*, cit., p. 194; Cf. also Modena, *Op. cit.*, pp. 47-50; Donnarumma, *Da lontano*, cit., pp. 69-73; Asor Rosa, *Stile Calvino*, cit., p. xii.

⁸²⁸ Burns, *Fragments of Impegno*, cit., p. 31.

⁸²⁹ Mimma Bresciani Califano, *Uno spazio senza miti*, cit., pp. 53-54, 82-83.

⁸³⁰ Antonello, *Dimenticare Pasolini*, cit., p. 141.

⁸³¹ Calvino, *Romanzi e racconti: Vol. 3*, cit., pp. 1320.

⁸³² Pilz, *Op. cit.*, p. 27; Massimo Bucciantini, *Op. cit.*, pp. 97-98.

consolidato nella tradizione culturale italiana e non, un'immagine che negli anni sessanta del Novecento stava vivendo un nuovo momento di splendore: quella delle due culture.⁸³³ One can however question the certainty with which Govoni makes this statement, since Calvino certainly did not refrain from mentioning his parents' scientific background in interviews and autobiographical statements and at the same time openly embraced science in a way that has turned him into an example of a writer with an eye for science.⁸³⁴ As son of scientists, Calvino knew well the similarities as well as the differences between artists and scientists and his comments can be read as betraying his (self-)consciousness about the label of 'scientific' writer. If it was indeed his strategy to detach himself from science as Govoni implies, he surely did an (uncharacteristically) bad job.

Calvino's stance might be better viewed as a negotiation of always shifting, porous boundaries that in Italian culture were however too often treated as iron walls. In a letter from America he writes that 'il problema della nostra civiltà è che oggi scrittori e scienziati non possono parlare tra loro, non hanno un linguaggio in comune'.⁸³⁵ Pierpaolo Antonello nonetheless appreciates the scientific attitude in the works of Calvino: 'vengono quindi riservati gli strumenti e i metodi mutuati dalle scienze esatte: osservazioni esterne, oggettuali (...) evitando ogni tentazione di auscultazione intimistica, mettendo tra parentesi l'io "narciso" e trattandolo sostanzialmente come strumento di osservazione implicato'.⁸³⁶ The Italian term 'scienze *esatte*' evokes clearly an important reason why Calvino is considered 'scientific', namely because of his exact (as well as exacting) nature. The easy slippage (which Antonello avoids) from 'oggettuali' to 'oggettivi' has been discussed in section 1.3. At this point it is more important to stress the relation between scientific observation (whether it be considered objective or merely objectivizing) and the elimination of the self that Antonello foregrounds.⁸³⁷ The role of *observation*

⁸³³ Govoni, 'La casa laboratorio', cit., p. 565.

⁸³⁴ Jeff Wallace, 'The World Before Eyes': Calvino, Barthes and Science', in *The Third Culture. Literature and Science*, ed. by Elinor S. Shaffer (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1997), pp. 269-84; Antonello, 'Letteratura e scienza', cit., 942-44.

⁸³⁵ Calvino, *Lettere*, cit., p. 648.

⁸³⁶ Antonello, *Il ménage*, cit., pp. 6.

⁸³⁷ Cf. Vittorio Spinazzola, 'L'io diviso', cit., pp. 94-98.

in describing Calvino's attitude as scientific comes repeatedly to the fore in critical analyses.⁸³⁸

Detachment, objectivity: these scientific ideals have eroded in a long historical process, but at the same time remain as spectres of what science is ultimately about. Even though he has been turned into a champion of what Mario Porro calls the 'ordering gaze', Calvino has also been argued to be a much more complex figure when it comes to objectivity.⁸³⁹ Palomar is a privileged hinge in Calvino's reputation as 'objective', but some critics view him as an example of the failure of objectivity, of what Isaac Rosier calls 'indecisive objectivity': 'For Palomar, bodies, desiring subjectivities, and objects are not things that are "out there" but shifting, interpretative horizons'.⁸⁴⁰ A couple of years earlier, Sharon Wood proposed a similar reading of Palomar:

While Calvino cannot bring himself entirely to abandon the rational, the ideal, this last book of his powerfully and movingly traces the intrusion of the messily human, the sheer overwhelming complexity of nature which defies the best efforts of the human mind to contain it, and (...) the irreducibility of the body as that which resists theorisation.⁸⁴¹

The use of the term 'body' both by Rosier and by Wood is highly significant here: especially in the early 1990s, a feminist revision of scientific objectivity privileged embodiment instead of detached gazes.⁸⁴² Through intersectionality this revision has merged with other strands of research which had reached similar conclusions (a

⁸³⁸ Claude Raffestin, 'Tra letteratura e scienza: Calvino o l'annalista della territorialità', in *La letteratura, la scienza*, cit., pp. 269-77, p. 277; Alberto Oliverio, 'L'opera di Italo Calvino alla luce delle «due culture»', in idem, pp. 82-88, p. 87.

⁸³⁹ Mario Porro, 'Networks and Knots: the Discrete and the Continuous in Literature: Italo Calvino and Carlo Emilio Gadda', *Science and Literature in Italian Culture: From Dante to Calvino*, ed. by Pierpaolo Antonello and Simon Gilson (Legenda: Oxford, 2004), pp. 254-75, pp. 254, 260-61.

⁸⁴⁰ Isaac Rosier, 'The Body, Eros, and the Limits of Objectivity in Calvino's Palomar', *Italian Quarterly*, 35.137-138 (1998), 23-33, pp. 25, 30.

⁸⁴¹ Sharon Wood, 'Mr Palomar Goes Shopping: Eros and Morphology in Italo Calvino', *Spunti e Ricerche: Rivista d'Italianistica*, 7-8 (1991), 23-33, p. 28. Cf. Piana, 'L'utopia corporea', cit., pp. 54, 68.

⁸⁴² Cf. Wanda Tommasi, 'Simone Weil: dare corpo al pensiero', in Diotima, *Mettere al mondo il mondo: oggetto e oggettività alla luce della differenza sessuale* (Milan: La Tartaruga, 1990), pp. 77-91; Lorraine Code, *What Can She Know?: Feminist Theory and the Construction of Knowledge* (Ithaca, N.Y.; London: Cornell University Press, 1991); Alison M. and Susan M. Bordo (eds.), *Gender/Body/Knowledge: the Feminist Reconstruction of Being and Knowing* (New Brunswick; London: Rutgers University Press, 1989); Flavia Padovani, Alan Richardson and Jonathan Y. Tsou (eds.), *Objectivity in Science: New Perspectives from Science and Technology Studies* (Cham: Springer, 2015).

coming together which sometimes has been termed ‘postfeminism’).⁸⁴³ Seen from this angle, *Palomar* all of a sudden is a book about embodiment, not about gazes from nowhere.

The amount of studies dedicated not merely to rationality in the works of Calvino, but also to the *boundaries* of that rationality, to otherness and diversity, the instinctive, the bodily, the natural and the animal, has increased over the past decades. For example, Marilyn Migiel has evidenced Calvino’s rethinking of boundaries and privileging of diversity in the trilogy, his attention for food, the role that women play in its narrative. Furthermore, she has stressed that the reputedly so ‘rational’ baron in the trees, heir of the Enlightenment, might not be so rational after all – and here we can draw a parallel with the later reception of the ‘objective’ *Palomar*.⁸⁴⁴ What might be at stake here (as argued as well in sections 1.2, 2.1 and 4.1) is a fundamental division between Calvino’s championed ‘style’ of writing (linear, crystalline according to somewhat too simplistic consensus) and the *content* of his works.⁸⁴⁵

Several scholars have recently analysed Calvino’s narratives from the perspective of animal studies and posthumanism. These analyses have predecessors in some Italian scholars such as Gian Carlo Ferretti and Giovanni Falaschi, who were soon to point out Calvino’s uncommon attention towards animals and his realization of the relativity of the human standpoint.⁸⁴⁶ Serenella Iovino has expanded these insights into the realm of animal studies and environmental studies. She states that ‘Calvino is perfectly aware that objectivity is a mere regulative ideal, in the first place because the human eye is conditioned by biocultural factors’.⁸⁴⁷ For Iovino,

⁸⁴³ Louise M. Antony and Charlotte E. Witt, *A Mind of One’s Own: Feminist Essays on Reason and Objectivity* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2001).

⁸⁴⁴ Marilyn Migiel, ‘The Phantasm of Omnipotence in Calvino’s Trilogy’, *Modern Language Studies*, 16.3 (1986), 57-68; Cf. Tommasina Gabriele, ‘Literature as Education and the Near-Perfect Protagonist: Narrative Structure in *Il barone rampante*’, *Stanford Italian Review*, 11.1-2 (1992), 91-102; Markey, *Op. cit.*, pp. 56-57.

⁸⁴⁵ I have argued something similar on critical attention for *eros* and sensuality in Calvino’s works: Cf. Elio Baldi, ‘La sfida al labirinto sessuale: l’eros nell’opera di Italo Calvino’, *Incontri: rivista europea di studi italiani*, 27.2 (2012), 60-68.

⁸⁴⁶ Giovanni Falaschi, *La resistenza armata nella narrativa italiana* (Turin: Einaudi, 1976); Gian Carlo Ferretti, *Le capre di bikini: Calvino giornalista e saggista 1945-1985* (Rome: Riuniti, 1989). Cf. also Brian Fitzgerald, ‘Animals, Evolution, Language: Aspects of Whitehead in Italo Calvino’s *Palomar*’, *Spunti e Ricerche: Rivista d’Italianistica*, 10 (1994), 43-61.

⁸⁴⁷ Serenella Iovino, ‘Hybridtales: Posthumanizing Calvino’, in *Thinking Italian Animals: Human and Posthuman in Modern Italian Literature and Film*, ed. by Elena Past and Deborah Amberson (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 215-32, p. 222.

Calvino's subjects are 'nomadic subjects', a clear and significant reference to the work of Rosi Braidotti, and – ultimately – to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari.⁸⁴⁸ Carrie Rohman stresses similarly that, in *Palomar*, there are 'various ahuman, creaturely modalities that decentre the Cartesian human and destabilize the human/animal barrier'.⁸⁴⁹ Rohman goes on to state that 'posthumanist discussions may be hampered by an overemphasis on alterity. Calvino's vision could be most valuable ethically because it posits the 'simultaneous difference and sameness of the nonhuman animal.' Rohman therefore thinks that Calvino's *Palomar* can even function as a sort of model or prototype for animal studies.⁸⁵⁰ Iovino seems to agree that Calvino can help to reassess the balance between self and other by stating that 'in his narratives, the entanglements with an otherness come often from within'.⁸⁵¹ Besides alterity, some of the Palomarian narratives touch upon the eye and the gaze of the animal, who is looking back at *Palomar*, interrogating the protagonist and throwing protagonist and reader off balance: the gaze is thus inverted, as well as the pretension of power that comes with the analytical gaze.⁸⁵² The combination of the abovementioned elements make Calvino a sort of 'proto-posthumanist' who prefigures many of the preoccupations of animal studies and ecocriticism.⁸⁵³ Serenella Iovino even maintains that Calvino's writings 'include the complete range of ecocritical motifs, whether naturalistic, theoretical, or eco-social'.⁸⁵⁴

⁸⁴⁸ Iovino, 'Hybriditales', cit., p. 228. Cf. Rosi Braidotti, 'Nomadic Ehtics', *Deleuze Studies*, 7.3 (2014), 342-59.

⁸⁴⁹ Carrie Rohman, 'On Singularity and the Symbolic: the Threshold of the Human in Calvino's Mr. *Palomar*', *Criticism: a Quarterly for Literature and the Arts* 51.1 (2009), 63-78, p. 63.

⁸⁵⁰ Rohman, 'On Singularity', cit., pp. 65, 76; For Calvino as antidote to an overemphasis on alterity, cf. Steven Shankman, *Other Others: Levinas, Literature, Transcultural Studies* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010), pp. 42-54.

⁸⁵¹ Iovino, Op. cit., p. 220. Cf. Orsola Rignani, *Umano?: una domanda per Italo Calvino e Michel Serres* (Fidenza: Mattioli 1885, 2012). Marilyn Schneider, 'Indistinct Boundaries: Calvino's Taste for Otherness', *Italian Quarterly* 30.115-116 (1989), 101-13.

⁸⁵² Rohman, Op. cit., pp. 72-73; Eugenio Bolongaro, 'Calvino's Encounter with the Animal: Anthropomorphism, Cognition and Ethics in *Palomar*', *Quaderni d'Italianistica*, XXV.2 (2009), 105-28.

⁸⁵³ Cf. also Robert P. Harrison, 'Towards a Philosophy of Nature', in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. by William Cronon (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1996), pp. 426-37; David Abram, *Becoming Animal: an Earthly Cosmology* (New York: Vintage Books, 2011), p. 285; Serenella Iovino, 'Storie dell'altro mondo: Calvino post-umano', *MLN*, 129.1 (2014), 118-38; Robert T. Tally Jr. and Christine M. Battista (eds.), *Ecocriticism and Geocriticism: Overlapping Territories in Environmental and Spatial Literary Studies* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016), p. 10; Bertrand Westphal, *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011).

⁸⁵⁴ Serenella Iovino, 'The Wilderness of the Human Other: Italo Calvino's *The Watcher* and a Reflection on the Future of Ecocriticism', in *The Future of Ecocriticism: New Horizons*, ed. by Serpil Oppermann et al. (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2011), pp. 65-80, p. 68; Cf. Ted Geier,

In a male-centred fictional universe, women form part of ‘alterity’ and ‘otherness’. Even though a recent interesting volume of Bridget Tompkins on Calvino’s women (to which I will return later) programmatically claims to fill a gap in Calvino research, at least from the publication of *Se una notte* onwards, critical attention to the role of women in Calvino’s fiction has surfaced often. Interestingly, though, there has not really been a linear debate on the topic, but more an assembly of sparse voices that hardly ever enter in (direct) dialogue with each other. Partially, this can be attributed to the unease that critics have felt about Calvino’s depiction of women, but it might also be true that Calvino approaches the topic in a complex, multifaceted manner that does not warrant clear-cut, unilateral conclusions. A palette of divergent and often contrasting opinions emerges from articles and books that address the subject. Roughly, one might say that Calvino’s direct *depiction* of women (or lack of depiction of their motivations and world views) on the whole is received rather negatively, whereas the possible liberating, feminist and postfeminist *implications* of his texts are often received positively.

An example of the latter is Cinzia Blum’s contention that Calvino prefigures the ‘role of affectivity in recent feminist approaches’ and that, in his preface to the *Fiabe*, he ‘singles out women in order to offer examples of narrative skills’, women who ‘illustrate the very “marrow” of storytelling’.⁸⁵⁵ This contention can be supported by Rosemary Arrojo’s emphasis on the fact that ‘the very powerful woman author-figure of Scheherazade (...) seems to have been the ultimate model’ for *Se una notte*.⁸⁵⁶ Moreover, Calvino’s statement in the essay *Right and wrong political uses of literature* that ‘literature must give voice to the voiceless’ is related by Blum to his ability to refigure ‘subjectivity in a relational setting’.⁸⁵⁷ Several questions arise in assessing Blum’s assertions: should one make a distinction between Calvino’s essays

‘Real life: Italo Calvino’s *funghi* ecology’, *PAN: Philohophy, Activism, Nature*, 10 (2013), 67-76, p. 67; Giulia Pacini, ‘Arboreal and Historical Perspectives from Calvino’s *Il barone rampante*’, *Romance Studies*, 32.1 (2014), 57-68; Gioia Woods, ‘Once Upon a Time in Ombrosa: Italo Calvino and the Fabulist Pastoral’, in *The Green Thread: Dialogues with the Vegetal World*, ed. by Patricia Vieira, Monica Gagliano and John Ryan (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015), pp. 165-81, pp. 169-70; Monica Seger, *Landscapes in Between: Environmental Change in Modern Italian Literature and Film* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), pp. 24-49.

⁸⁵⁵ Cinzia Blum, *Rewriting the Journey in Contemporary Italian Literature: Figures of Subjectivity in Progress* (Toronto, Ont.; London: University of Toronto Press, 2008), p. 37.

⁸⁵⁶ Rosemary Arrojo, ‘The Gendering of Translation in Fiction: Translators, Authors and Women/Texts in Scliar and Calvino’, in *Gender, Sex, and Translation: the Manipulation of Identities*, ed. by José Santaemilia (Manchester: St. Jerome Pub., 2005), pp. 81-95, 93; Cf. Wilhelm, *Op. cit.*, p. 223.

⁸⁵⁷ Blum, *Rewriting the Journey*, cit., pp. 30, 39, 40.

on the one hand and his fiction on the other? Is the authorial position with respect to the content of his works part of the discussion?⁸⁵⁸ And even: should consistency be requested of the author when it comes to such culturally and politically ‘sticky’ themes? When, for example, Blum argues that Calvino very positively highlights the new role of women in the cultural realm in *Il midollo del leone*, one can contrast this with Richard Andrews’ assertion that the later *Il mare dell’oggettività* is not quite as enlightened in this respect.⁸⁵⁹

When it comes to Calvino’s fiction, there seems to be a general agreement that ‘chaos and women are associated with the Other, both object of desire yet threat to the ideal of order’.⁸⁶⁰ The *Cosmicomiche* have engendered a great amount of articles on love, desire and otherness, but the most clear-cut critique on a predominantly *female* transposition of otherness has, however, not targeted so much the *Cosmicomiche* but more *Se una notte*. The first comments on Calvino’s uneven treatment of gender in *Se una notte* came already in 1979, from Cesare Garboli.⁸⁶¹ The most pronounced critic in the matter has however certainly been Teresa De Lauretis, who had already established herself as an esteemed Calvino critic through her analyses of semiotic and poststructuralist aspects of Calvino’s works. De Lauretis’ criticism is harsh and has been repeated afterwards and universalized by many critics indicating a factual lack in Calvino’s works.⁸⁶² A suspicion is hard to shed though: did Calvino intend to provoke this attention, through his exaggeratedly detailed emphasis on the male/female divide in the novel, addressing male and female reader apart? It seems unlikely that Calvino, after a decade of important feminist discourses in Italy, was not conscious of the kind of reading he was bound to evoke. In fact, as has been underlined by many scholars, the novel abounds with parody and does not spare feminist discourses.

⁸⁵⁸ In his introduction to the American version of Carlo Emilio Gadda’s *That Awful Mess on the Via Merulana* Calvino seems to imply that it does, Cf. Carlo Emilio Gadda, *That Awful Mess on the Via Merulana* (London: Quartet, 1985), p. xi.

⁸⁵⁹ Richard Andrews, ‘Calvino’s Fictional Women’, in *Sguardi sull’Italia: miscellanea dedicata a Francesco Villari dalla Society for Italian Studies*, ed. by Gino Bedani et al. (Exeter: Society for Italian Studies, 1997), pp. 171-83, 171-72.

⁸⁶⁰ Albert Sbragia, ‘Italo Calvino’s Ordering of Chaos’, *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*, 39.2 (1993), 283-306, p. 293.

⁸⁶¹ Cesare Garboli, ‘Come sei lettrice?’, *Paragone*, 366 (1980), 63-71.

⁸⁶² Teresa de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film and Fiction* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989), pp. 71-83.

Some critics who do not approach Calvino's work from inside the framework of Calvino studies but from other perspectives have separately suggested similar readings along parodistic lines. M. Keith Booker, for example, sees *Se una notte* as a parodistic transgression of psychoanalysis and feminism as 'official modes of interpreting texts'.⁸⁶³ In another volume Booker expands on this reading, entering into an explicit – but often overlooked – dialogue with De Lauretis. Booker's contention is that Calvino anticipated exactly the kind of reading of De Lauretis, through his explicit foregrounding of 'castration' in the novel as well as of a reader who finds in books 'what she was already convinced of before reading them' (the object of Calvino's critique is thus not feminism *per se* according to Booker, but more broadly reading strategies that do not respect the text). Moreover Booker sets about 'correcting' a couple of 'blatant misreadings' in De Lauretis' otherwise fine and sophisticated analysis, questions all too simple dichotomies that have been pointed out in the novel and defends the ending as 'clearly a parody of the tradition'.⁸⁶⁴ Irene Kacandes agrees with Booker without referring to him, arguing that what is so 'palpable' can only be intended to draw attention to gender relations and the inequality of the addressees in the book, and this is especially true for the ending.⁸⁶⁵ Bella Brodzki and Rosemary Arrojo present similar viewpoints, the latter writing for example:

As it blatantly sexualizes textual relations and activities, Calvino's novel exposes in an exemplary fashion how the association between creative power and masculinity is (still) deeply inscribed in a culture that insists in establishing definite hierarchical oppositions between male and female roles, writing and reading, originals and translations, subject and object, and which (still) relates property rights exclusively to men.⁸⁶⁶

⁸⁶³ M. Keith Booker, *Techniques of Subversion in Modern Literature: Transgression, Abjection and the Carnavalesque* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1991), p. 133.

⁸⁶⁴ M. Keith Booker, *Literature and Domination: Sex, Knowledge and Power in Modern Fiction* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1993), pp. 128-34; Sylvie Barral points as well to the presence of a whole range of female readers in the novel besides Ludmilla and Lotaria: Cf. Sylvie Barral, 'Les personnages féminins dans l'oeuvre d'Italo Calvino: d'une image simple à une image plurielle', *Italies*, 3 (1999), 164-85 <<http://italies.revues.org/2458>> [Accessed 17 May 2016].

⁸⁶⁵ Irene Kacandes, *Talk Fiction: Literature and the Talk Explosion* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), pp. 192, 194-95; Cf. Earl G. Ingersoll, *Waiting for the End: Gender and Ending in the Contemporary Novel* (Madison: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 2007), pp. 228-235; Schneider, 'Subject or Object', cit., p. 180; Mara Mauri Jacobsen, 'Se una notte d'inverno e il "racconto" laciano sull'amore', *Quaderni d'Italianistica*, 13.2 (1992), 217-30, p. 229.

⁸⁶⁶ Arrojo, 'The Gendering of Translation', cit., p. 92; Cf. Bella Brodzki, *Can These Bones Live? Translation, Survival and Cultural Memory* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2007), pp. 33-36; Marguerite La Caze, *The Analytic Imaginary* (Ithaca, N.Y.; London: Cornell University Press, 2002), pp. 66-67.

Arrojo's perspective is translation, and significantly translation is frequently foregrounded within the novel itself. The relation between gender and translation was already being fruitfully deconstructed at the time when Calvino was writing his novel (moreover, important contributions came from France), and since then the tropes of translation posing the danger of infidelity, castration, loss of phallus, paternity, authority and originality have been questioned time and again.⁸⁶⁷ When, in 1979, shortly after the publication of *Se una notte* but in reference to other books, Calvino is asked about feminist issues he is somewhat evasive but clearly informed. He calls these feminist issues 'temi che sono nell'aria', describes a certain 'tensione' of male writers and mentions the 'estremismi' of Valerie Jean Solanas.⁸⁶⁸ Anticipating a later argument, it is important to stress here that what seems (still) to be at stake in the different, diametrically opposed readings, is how we as critics read Calvino into his own text: does he 'agree' with protagonists and narrators or does he keep an ironic distance? And, if the latter is the case, does this distance 'justify' Calvino in presenting stereotypes, albeit in a parodistic manner?

This difference in 'projection' by critics keeps surfacing, in spite of the 'official' reading that the female part in Calvino's fiction is problematic and predictable. For example, in a short, openly feminist reading of the *Città invisibili* through Luce Irigaray, Malgorzata Myk writes: 'Were Irigaray to read *Invisible Cities*, she might well reply (...) "But woman? Is not to be reduced to mere femininity. Or to falsehood, or appearance, or beauty"'.⁸⁶⁹ Argumentation is however very succinct in her article and again one might wonder: will Calvino have been oblivious to what he was doing in naming all his (exotic) cities after women? Moira Gatens seems to suggest that such a doubt is justified at least in the case of one city, Zobeide (precisely one of the most openly 'sexist'), which she calls 'rather atypical,

⁸⁶⁷ Cf. Roger Zuber, *Les "belles infidèles" et la formation du goût classique* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1995); Philip E. Lewis, 'Vers la traduction abusive', in *Les fins de l'homme: à partir du travail de Jacques Derrida: colloque de Cerisy, 23 juillet-2 août 1980*, ed. by Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy (Paris: Galilée, 1981), pp. 253-61; Susan Gubar, "'The Blank Page' and the Issues of Female Creativity", in *Gender Studies: New Directions in Feminist Criticism*, ed. by Judith Spector (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1986), pp. 10-29; Christine Brooke-Rose, 'Woman as a Semiotic Object', in *The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. by Susan Rubin Suleiman (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), pp. 305-16; Lori Chamberlain, 'Gender and the Metaphorics of Translation', in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. by Lawrence Venuti (London; New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 306-21.

⁸⁶⁸ Calvino, *Sono nato*, cit., pp. 327-29.

⁸⁶⁹ Malgorzata Myk, 'The Immemorial Waters of Venice: Woman as Anodyne in Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*', *Explicator*, 67.3 (2009), 221-24.

for it tells the failure of the desire to “capture” and to “contain” difference in a monument to unity’.⁸⁷⁰ Analogously, when Aurore Frasson-Marin describes Calvino’s women as animalesque, often objectified, fragmented, related to predictive imagery of fish and viscosity, the examples are abundant and she is spoilt for choice.⁸⁷¹ Others, such as Angela Jeannet and Marie-Line Cassagne, still maintain however that Calvino’s female figures change frequently, and that they do not only take the shape of the ‘amazon’ or ‘reader’ (or of the ‘donna isterica’ and the ‘donna gaia’ to adopt Bonsaver’s terms – and still other binaries have been proposed).⁸⁷² Guido Bonsaver calls women a mere ‘controcanto’ to the ‘rational’ male figures in Calvino, whereas Nocentini somewhat more positively writes about women who are ‘complementari (...) il più possibile paritario’.⁸⁷³ We have already seen, moreover, that precisely readings that focus on the presence of the (female) ‘other’ cast serious doubts on the supposed rationality of Calvino’s male characters. Irony often strikes mostly the male figures and the female perspective knocks them off balance, dismantles the fiction of their more or less self-assured rationality.⁸⁷⁴ Dana Renga extends this questioning to a critical stance towards society at large when she writes that: ‘the textual presence of many of Calvino’s female protagonists [in *Gli amori difficili*] problematizes traditionally “masculine” and patriarchal issues of control and authority’. The use of the impersonal phrasing ‘textual presence’ denotes that Calvino’s personal opinion in the matter is not of the foremost importance to Renga.⁸⁷⁵

A recent, rich contribution on the topic is the aforementioned volume of Bridget Tompkins, which approaches Calvino’s *Gli amori difficili* and *Il cavaliere inesistente* from the framework of the Pygmalion myth. One of the undeniably

⁸⁷⁰ Moira Gatens, *Imaginary Bodies: Ethics, Power and Corporeality* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 28; Cf. Marilyn Schneider, ‘Subject or Object: *Mr. Palomar* and *Invisible Cities*’, in *Calvino Revisited*, cit., pp. 171-87, pp. 179-80.

⁸⁷¹ Cf. Aurore Frasson-Marin, *Italo Calvino et l’imaginaire* (Genève: Slatkine, 1986), pp. 129-34, 343.

⁸⁷² Angela Jeannet, *Under the Radiant Sun*, cit., p. 154; Marie-Line Cassagne, ‘La femme et l’amour dans l’oeuvre romanesque d’Italo Calvino’, *Chroniques Italiennes: Série Web*, 9.1 (2006), pp. 1-2; Bonsaver, *Il mondo scritto*, cit., pp. 234-44.

⁸⁷³ Bonsaver, *Il mondo scritto*, cit., p. 244; Claudia Nocentini, ‘«Saio o bikini? Vada per l’armatura»: esplorazioni di guardaroba del Calvino degli anni ’50’, in *Vested Voices II: Creating with Transvestism: from Bertolucci to Boccaccio*, ed. by Federica G. Pedriali and Rossella Riccobono (Ravenna: Longo, 2007), pp. 59-65, p. 60.

⁸⁷⁴ Marilyn Schneider, ‘Calvino’s Erotic Metaphor and the Hermaphroditic Solution’, *Stanford Italian Review*, 2.1 (1981), 93-118, pp. 98, 110-11.

⁸⁷⁵ Dana Renga, ‘Looking Out: Calvino’s Vision of the “Economic Miracle”’, *Italica*, 80.3 (2003), 371-88, p. 379.

valuable contributions of Tompkins is a methodological one which remains implicit: she cites many female critics, something that rarely happens in Calvino studies and that represents a conscious effort to approach Calvino from a more feminized point of view. The analysis is detailed and combines close reading with insights from the broad spectrum of cultural studies and psychoanalysis. Nevertheless, some matters arise while reading the volume. Even though Tompkins acknowledges that a literary work has to be understood in its ‘social, historical and cultural context’, she presents a highly selective set of Calvino’s works (a set of works, moreover, that have been analysed from the same point of view several times before), adding that her analysis can be extended to the rest of Calvino’s oeuvre because the same essential image of women permeates his works.⁸⁷⁶ Dana Renga, in contrast, analyses exactly the same material within its historical context and concludes that Calvino’s ‘feminized male characters (...) do not subscribe to traditional family values’ and his women ‘often oppose desired gender roles of the “new Italy”’.⁸⁷⁷

Scattered throughout the book, Tompkins herself offers many interesting fractures in her own watertight premises and conclusions, claiming for example that Calvino’s ‘female characters defy general categorisation systems’, that he ‘employs and subverts stereotypes’, practices ‘inversion’, ‘parodies’ a ‘long tradition’, depicts behaviour in a character that is ‘unconventional for a married woman’, writes passages that include the ‘hermaphroditic’ as well as ‘cross-dressing’, and that his works are ‘far from repelling a Freudian reading’.⁸⁷⁸ She seems to agree with Renga that ‘female identity is depicted as continually in the making (...) impossible to pinpoint or objectify’, for example when she writes that Calvino’s ‘female characters (...) may lack flesh and bones but they are more than simple flattened flowers’.⁸⁷⁹

Tompkins presents some interesting points, although many of them have been recognized before within Calvino criticism. She argues that the perspective in

⁸⁷⁶ Bridget Tompkins, *Calvino and the Pygmalion Paradigm* (Leicester: Troubadour, 2015), pp. xiv, x. Cf. with Sylvie Barral’s contention that the female characters in Calvino progressively gain in complexity: Sylvie Barral, ‘Les personnages féminins’, cit.

⁸⁷⁷ Renga, ‘Looking Out’, cit., pp. 372, 373.

⁸⁷⁸ Tompkins, *Calvino and the Pygmalion Paradigm*, cit., pp. xi, 33, 39, 129, 133, 145, 161, 171. For the last contention, cf. Giuliana Sanguineti Katz, ‘La representación de la mujer en *I racconti* de Calvino’, in *Italo Calvino: nuevas visiones*, cit., pp. 161-73; Alessandra Diazzì, ‘The Symptoms of Desire: Psychoanalytic Echoes in Calvino’s Short Stories’, in *The Fire Within: Desire in Modern and Contemporary Italian Literature*, ed. by Elena Borelli (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), pp. 166-89.

⁸⁷⁹ Renga, *Op. cit.*, p. 374; Tompkins, *Op. cit.*, p. 59.

Calvino's fiction is almost exclusively male, and this is undeniably the case. Moreover, she stresses the fact that there are no well-rounded female characters in Calvino's fiction, something which Bonsaver and Ruggero Pierantoni also argued.⁸⁸⁰ Here, one might however venture to sow some doubt: is Calvino not the author who did not believe in well-rounded characters in the first place? How many well-rounded *male* characters are there in Calvino's fiction, 'una narrativa senza personaggi e senza uomini'?⁸⁸¹ This 'mirror image' should be addressed if one is to convincingly argue for a *selective* gender-lack on Calvino's part. The point that the narrator and the perspective are almost always respectively male and male-centred is an important and valuable argument. However, to ask for well-rounded *female* characters in an author who (apart from the occasional protagonist) does not present well-rounded *male* characters is arguably somewhat female-centred. Similarly, whereas Bonsaver points to the fact that 'è lecito pensare a un Calvino intento a rappresentare la "maschio-dipendenza" della donna italiana' (a reading that also Renga seems to adopt), Tompkins foregrounds a psychoanalytical and biographical reading in which Calvino's (verisimilar) *choice* is rendered of no consequence.⁸⁸² Irony, parody and inversion are values of degree and conscious bestowal of meaning that do not really have their place in such an analysis.

Even in the stories that have women as protagonists, the perspective is male-centred and the women are dependent on the men – argues Tompkins. The first point is indeed important to recognize, as is the second, but again with a possible attenuating circumstance: is it not equally true that Calvino's men depend on women as well?⁸⁸³ The sheer omnipresence of women in Calvino's fiction seems to indicate as much, even though they tend to be present as an 'other' and reference point, in some cases serving as an affirmation of a male perspective, in other instances troubling or perplexing. Women are a frequent presence in the Calvinian microcosm, but not in the same way as men are. This dependence of the woman on the man in Calvino's fiction is an argument which has been oft repeated.⁸⁸⁴ Marilyn Schneider

⁸⁸⁰ Tompkins, *Op. cit.*, p. 123; Bonsaver, *Il mondo scritto*, cit., p. 232; Ruggero Pierantoni, 'Metafore di una mappa', in *Italo Calvino: la letteratura, la scienza*, cit., pp 89-93, p. 92.

⁸⁸¹ Giovanni Falaschi, 'Negli anni del neorealismo', in *Italo Calvino: atti del convegno internazionale*, cit., pp. 113-40, p. 132.

⁸⁸² Bonsaver, *Il mondo scritto*, cit., p. 234; Renga, *Op. cit.*, 273.

⁸⁸³ Cf. Spinazzola, 'L'io diviso', cit., p. 95.

⁸⁸⁴ Cf. Bonsaver, *Il mondo scritto*, cit., p. 234; Frasson-Marin, *Italo Calvino*, cit., p. 134; Schneider, 'Calvino's Erotic Metaphor', cit., pp. 97, 100.

writes for instance: ‘Calvino’s archetypal woman is both reified desire (male lack) and a mirror of truth (male self-reflection).’⁸⁸⁵ One could thus say that female characters in Calvino’s fiction are mostly *functional* to the narrative. This is potentially problematic, but somewhat perplexing is a conclusion of Tompkins in this respect: ‘masculine words can express only what men *think* women feel’.⁸⁸⁶ If this is indeed the case, Calvino could not have acted otherwise, except by drastically removing any female trace from his fiction (which would be equally problematic). Calvino’s choice or agency again seems inconsequential for Tompkins. An illustrative comparison can be made with Richard Andrews’ article about Calvino’s women. Throughout the article, the uncomfortable position of its author is clearly visible, since he argues but withholds from making any real statements, and at several instances Andrews explains that only a woman can really give the last word on these matters.⁸⁸⁷ The same question mark applies here: if only a woman can confirm Andrews’ arguments against Calvino, if a man cannot adopt a convincing female standpoint, the argument itself seems self-contradictory.

Towards the end of her book Tompkins writes that ‘critics generally assign that role [of protagonist] to the character or characters that best fit their own line of investigation and even if the issue is not addressed specifically, a fundamental drive for the decision appears to be where and how the critic fits himself into the picture.’⁸⁸⁸ This seems in fact to be the case for Tompkins own analysis as well. Tompkins assigns the role of ‘protagonist’ to certain stories, but fails to treat other stories in the same amount of detail. *L’avventura di due sposi* is hardly mentioned, and precisely this story was viewed positively by De Lauretis and Renga. The latter contends that here ‘the author comes the closest he ever has to depicting a love story in which affection and tenderness is [*sic*] mutually given and received.’⁸⁸⁹

Part of my argument here is that Tompkins does not necessarily argue as much *against* Calvino as she seems to suggest. The insinuations are all there, openly, manifold, at the surface of Calvino’s text and have in fact been picked up by critics

⁸⁸⁵ Schneider, ‘Calvino’s Erotic Metaphor’, cit., p. 104.

⁸⁸⁶ Tompkins, *Op. cit.*, p. 166.

⁸⁸⁷ Andrews, ‘Calvino’s Fictional Women’, cit.

⁸⁸⁸ Tompkins, *Op. cit.*, p. 157.

⁸⁸⁹ Renga, *Op. cit.*, p. 371. Cf. Jeannet’s statement on *Sotto il sole giaguaro*, ‘a story in which the encounter between man and women opens up the possibility of a completely reciprocal rapport’, Jeannet, *Under the Radiant Sun*, cit., p. 174.

from very early on. A psychoanalytical reading might be more unprecedented in the case of *Il castello*, which includes many highly aggressive, vampiristic female presences and has been relatively neglected.⁸⁹⁰ Moreover, if the interest is really in studying Calvino's silences, the blank spaces on his map, the omnipresent female is, arguably, not the most fruitful subject: a queer or postcolonial reading would, potentially, more appropriately address some of Calvino's silent, interstitial spaces.⁸⁹¹ Even though, with Calvino, in spite of his taciturn nature, there is almost never a complete silence: 'in questo io bisogna riconoscere la parte che ha il fatto che sono un bianco eurocentrico consumista petrolifago e alfabetiero'.⁸⁹²

Tompkins' reading seems still suggested by the fact that Calvino has the aforementioned reputation as 'l'occhio' and Calvino's authorial shadow sometimes appears to impede a more ambivalent, complex and complete reading of the feminine in his texts. In fact 'Calvino's own obsession with the gaze' comes to the fore in Tompkins' discussion about scopophilia and voyeurism.⁸⁹³ Again, other readings have been presented: Dana Renga reads the story of Amilcare Carruga (*L'avventura di un miope*) as one about the 'ironies of vision', and Usnelli (*L'avventura di un poeta*) for her even signifies the 'negation of vision'. This leads her to state that vision is often a 'female privilege' in Calvino's *Gli amori difficili*.⁸⁹⁴ The choice of words is significant here: Renga talks predominantly about 'vision', whereas Tompkins more frequently adopts the term 'gaze'; two different translations with very different connotations of the more broad Italian 'sguardo'.⁸⁹⁵ Moreover, several scholars (amongst whom Tompkins herself) have pointed out that Calvino also redirects the gaze backwards, by having the female characters scrutinize the male

⁸⁹⁰ Cf. Schneider, 'Calvino's Erotic Metaphor', cit., pp. 114-18; Bonsaver, *Il mondo scritto*, cit., p. 230.

⁸⁹¹ For a very rare treatment of Calvino in broadly postcolonial terms, cf. Gil Anidjar, 'The Blood of Freedom', in *Experiences of Freedom in Postcolonial Literatures and Cultures*, ed. by Annalisa Oboe and Shaul Bassi (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 123-31; for some fleeting glimpses of a 'queer Calvino', cf. Gregory Woods, *Homintern: How Gay Culture Liberated the Modern World* (New York; Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2016).

⁸⁹² Calvino, *Saggi*, cit., p. 2825.

⁸⁹³ Tompkins, *Op. cit.*, p. 97; Cf. Belpoliti, *L'occhio di Calvino*, cit., pp. 46-47.

⁸⁹⁴ Renga, *Op. cit.*, pp. 382, 384.

⁸⁹⁵ Cf. Rebecca West, *Gianni Celati: the Craft of Everyday Storytelling* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), pp. 93-94.

ones in a mirrored gaze that unsettles male certainties and alleged hierarchical implications between ‘gazing’ subject and ‘gazed upon’ object.⁸⁹⁶

The difference between ‘sguardo’ and ‘gaze’ warrants a parenthesis, because it illustrates the potential pitfalls of travelling theory, of theory in translation and the differences in connotations it can bring about.⁸⁹⁷ In an Italian introduction to cultural studies, in the chapter on feminist studies we find the following description of one of its key aspects: ‘un lavoro di re-visione dell’intera tradizione letteraria che ha cristallizzato il femminile in rischiosi stereotipi con immagini condizionate dallo sguardo (gaze) maschile’.⁸⁹⁸ ‘Sguardo’ does not carry the full implication of ‘gaze’, the complete tradition of a theoretical context of use, and as a consequence needs to be accompanied by the English term between brackets.⁸⁹⁹ This is precisely what Mieke Bal addressed when she tried to ‘disperse’ the gaze, which brought her to include a broad selection of other terms like ‘vision’ and ‘focalization’ to counter the perceived dependence of theory on the concept of the gaze.⁹⁰⁰ Interestingly, Calvino’s translator, William Weaver, has remarked – albeit from another viewpoint and in a different context, commenting upon a piece from Gadda – about the difficulty of translating ‘sguardo’ and the unsatisfying ‘solution’ of choosing ‘gaze’.⁹⁰¹ In fact, in the English translation of Calvino’s *Palomar*, we find the word ‘gaze’ with a great frequency, more than possible alternatives such as ‘glance’, ‘look’, ‘eyes’, ‘view’ or ‘vision’, even though Weaver seems to have made an effort to differentiate his translations of ‘sguardo’. Anglo-Saxon critics have likewise foregrounded the gaze in analyses of Calvino. Kathryn Hume opens her volume with the assertion ‘The Maze and the Gaze: in a word, the fictions of Calvino’ and devotes a chapter to the ‘Gazing I’, emphasising precisely the gaze that is so problematic in

⁸⁹⁶ Tompkins, *Op. cit.*, p. 133; Bonsaver, *Il mondo scritto*, cit., 222; For a discussion of a similar inversion of the gaze in *Palomar* and *La giornata*, cf. Piana, ‘L’utopia corporea’, cit., 56. For an example of a theoretical discussion that displaces the gaze from the male to the female subject cf. Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (New York; London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 125-56.

⁸⁹⁷ Interesting material for comparison is Emily Apter’s discussion of ‘sex’ and ‘gender’ as ‘untranslatables of theory’ between French and English: Apter, *Op. cit.*, pp. 156-74.

⁸⁹⁸ Michele Cometa, *Dizionario degli studi culturali* (Rome: Meltemi Editore, 2004), p. 131.

⁸⁹⁹ Cf. Di Blasio, *Teoria e pratiche dello sguardo*, cit., pp. 15, 43.

⁹⁰⁰ Cf. Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson, *Looking In: the Art of Viewing* (Amsterdam: G+B Arts International, 2001), pp. 41-64.

⁹⁰¹ William Weaver, ‘The Process of Translation’, in *The Craft of Translation*, ed. by John Biguenet and Rainer Schulte (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), pp. 117-24, pp. 118-19.

the context of Feminist Studies: 'his gaze sometimes resembles that of a scientist: he observes patiently, often passive and bodiless'.⁹⁰²

An intriguing instance of the relationship between Calvino and the body/gaze dichotomy in (early) feminism comes from a copy of *Le Troisième Corps*, by the well-known French feminist Hélène Cixous.⁹⁰³ In the book we find an inscription by the author on the half-title which reads: 'For Italo Calvino, between our books with one or more eyes.'⁹⁰⁴ Very suggestively, Calvino's eye surveys Cixous' books by admission of the author herself, and he is also the 'eye' in this book from 1970 (when Calvino was living in Paris), a book that foregrounds the body already in its title. Also in Italy, in these years, the stress on the body and bodily consciousness was strong.⁹⁰⁵ Afterwards, also in Anglo-Saxon criticism, the body has been foregrounded time and again, also in more abstract terms, as a concept that overcomes the subject/object division.⁹⁰⁶ Because of the theorized effacement of the embodied person, the Death of the Author has logically been a highly suspicious concept for feminist critics.⁹⁰⁷

So when Tompkins writes about the 'male gaze with its associated implications', she refers back to decades of feminist writing, as well as to the 'occhio-penna' that critics have ascribed to Calvino.⁹⁰⁸ Nonetheless, the heavy reliance on the body as a form of resistance to the dominating gaze has been questioned implicitly and explicitly in more recent feminist studies. The possibility

⁹⁰² Hume, *Calvino's Fictions*, cit., pp. 1, 33-56, 5.

⁹⁰³ And, in her case, instead of 'gaze' one should actually use the French 'regard', a term that returns often as well in Aurore Frasson-Marin's volume, a word that was also an integral part of Jacques Lacan's vocabulary (among others). A similar translation issue ensues: Cf. Joan Copjec, *Read My Desire: Lacan Against the Historicists* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT Press, 1994), pp. 15-38.

⁹⁰⁴ <http://www.peterharrington.co.uk/rare-books/french-language-rare-books/le-troisieme-corps/>. Translation mine.

⁹⁰⁵ Cf. Carla Lonzi, *Sputiamo su Hegel: la donna clitoridea e la donna vaginale* (Milano: Gammalibri, 1982); Maud Anne Bracke, *Women and the Reinvention of the Political: Feminism in Italy 1968-1983* (New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 2.

⁹⁰⁶ Toril Moi, *What Is a Woman?: and Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 68, 73-74.

⁹⁰⁷ Cf. Cheryl Walker, 'Feminist Literary Criticism and the Author', *Critical Inquiry*, 16.3 (1990), 551-71; Elizabeth Grosz, *Space, Time and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies* (New York; London: Routledge, 1995); Sara Ahmed, *Differences That Matter: Feminist Theory and Postmodernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 120-25; Mary Eagleton, *Figuring the Woman Author in Contemporary Fiction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 15-36.

⁹⁰⁸ Tompkins, *Op. cit.*, p. 99; Belpoliti, *L'occhio di Calvino*, cit., p. 272.

of the inversion of the gaze, which we have touched upon above, is only part of this rewriting of feminist discourse. As Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey write:

Although as individual texts many of the books on ‘the body’ in feminist theory during this period did not seek to fetishize bodies or extract them from their contexts of production and consumption, one effect of their combined impact has arguably been for sources and readings in this area to designate ‘the body’ an object of study.⁹⁰⁹

In other words, the body risks becoming a mere marker of discourse and of a convergence of interests, an unquestioned premise.⁹¹⁰ Already in 1991, Donna Haraway even programmatically stated her intention to place ‘metaphorical reliance on a much maligned sensory system in feminist discourse: vision’. She recognizes that the problematic reputation of vision derives mostly from the reputation of the

conquering gaze from nowhere. This is the gaze that mythically inscribes all the marked bodies, that makes the unmarked category claim the power to see and not be seen, to represent while escaping representation. This gaze signifies the unmarked positions of Man and White, one of the many nasty tones of the word objectivity to feminist ears.⁹¹¹

Firstly, it is important to notice that Haraway, again proposes ‘vision’ as opposed to ‘gaze’. More importantly, however, a closer description than the above of the general reputation of Calvino (who is also white and male) is hardly possible. Winterson seems to suggest as much when she writes that one cannot get close to Calvino the man: ‘With Calvino, what’s left is the body of work, and maybe that is everything.’⁹¹² Calvino’s body is constituted by his works. He is nowhere to be found, except in the gaze of his texts.

This is not to say that the body does not form part of Calvino’s fictional universe, only that it does so in a different way, which seems to tie in with more recent developments in feminist criticism. Cynthia Ozick, for example, does stress the body in her positive appreciation of Calvino’s posthumous *Sotto il sole giaguaro*, but this body is clearly a more open, fluid one, part of a bigger cosmological whole.

⁹⁰⁹ Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey (eds.), *Thinking Through the Skin* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 16.

⁹¹⁰ This resonates with a broader editorial context as well. An interesting example of this is that all the more or less feminist writers associated with Calvino in this section (Angela Carter, Jeanette Winterson, A. S. Byatt, Hélène Cixous and Cynthia Ozick) have published books or stories with ‘body’ or ‘flesh’ in the title.

⁹¹¹ Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: the Reinvention of Nature* (London: Free Association, 1991), p. 188.

⁹¹² Jeanette Winterson, ‘Italo Calvino’, *The Times*, 17 December 2002.

Ozick writes about the ‘body of the organic and inorganic world’ as well as ‘the body as a cornucopia of sensation or as an echoing palace with manifold windows, each a shifting kaleidoscope.’⁹¹³ Adriana Cavarero focuses on *Un re in ascolto* from the same volume to show that ‘Calvino compie un gesto davvero rivoluzionario’ in performing an inversion of male-female roles through a problematization of the body-mind dichotomy produced merely by a (singing) voice.⁹¹⁴ These positive responses to Calvino that centre precisely on his depiction of fictional bodies is representative of an appreciation by feminist scholars that is to be found in dispersed traces, but which is nonetheless significant. Rosi Braidotti has referred to Calvino in several instances and even ends her volume, *Patterns of Dissonance*, with Calvino’s ‘lightness’, which she takes as an exemplum in her book that advocates the body as ‘interaction of material and symbolic forces’. ‘Lightness’ for her is the ‘semiotic fluid that webs together our multi-layered context’.⁹¹⁵ In a more recent article, Braidotti has stressed that reason is ‘affective, embodied, dynamic’ and she has developed her research interests in the direction of the posthuman, calling Calvino’s works in a recent interview ‘la poetica del mondo postumano’.⁹¹⁶ This different, broader concept of the body has been foregrounded as well by those who have hailed Calvino as a ‘prophet of the software culture’, which extends our body in a network of modern technology, modern forms of ‘writing’ and codifying the world.⁹¹⁷

This changing appreciation of Calvino’s work from a feminist and posthumanist perspective (as well as from the viewpoint of scholars from animal studies or ecocriticism) thus hinges in large part on the altering significance of the body for critics. In this respect, once again, *Palomar* seems the privileged gateway for such a reappraisal. Whereas Marco Belpoliti (in a book that is entitled *L’occhio di Calvino*) sees *Palomar* as a ‘libro mentale per eccellenza’ with a Monsieur Teste-like character who ‘esclude il corpo (...) e sceglie l’occhio-mente’, that allows Calvino to

⁹¹³ Cynthia Ozick, ‘Mouth, Ear, Nose’, on <http://www.nytimes.com/1988/10/23/books/mouth-ear-nose.html?pagewanted=all> (23 October 1988).

⁹¹⁴ Adriana Cavarero, *A più voci: filosofia dell’espressione vocale* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2003), p. 12.

⁹¹⁵ Rosi Braidotti, *Patterns of Dissonance: a Study of Women in Contemporary Philosophy* (Oxford: Polity, 1991), pp. 282, 283.

⁹¹⁶ Rosi Braidotti, ‘Meta(l)flesh’, in *The Future of Flesh: a Cultural Survey of the Body*, ed. by Effie Yiannopoulou (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 241-61, p. 245; For the interview by Sibilla Destefani, cf. <http://www.rose.uzh.ch/dam/jcr:fffff9dd4839/intervistarosiintegrale.pdf>.

⁹¹⁷ Cf. Mazzarella, *Op. cit.*; Massimo Riva, *Pinocchio digitale: post-umanesimo e iper-romanzo* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2012), pp.95-144; Agata Piromallo Gambardella, *Profeti della software culture: Joyce, Rilke, Calvino* (Milan: Angeli, 2013).

explore a ‘sguardo pienamente oggettivo’ (a contention which he then proceeds to link with the famous ‘come scriverei bene se non ci fossi’), other critics have proposed diametrically opposed readings.⁹¹⁸ *Palomar* offers such an occasion for reflection to Sharon Wood, for example, who writes that: ‘in Calvino’s work there is a significant shift, a sea-change, away from “bodiless rationality” to a phenomenological position’, welcoming the ‘intrusion of the messily human’.⁹¹⁹ Angela Jeannet concurs that even though the ‘eye is the ruling metaphor (...) and the discourse is rational, masculine and singular’ there is ‘something hidden, restlessness, nervousness, a sense of probable inadequacy’ which eventually makes *Palomar* a ‘pitiless exploration’ of a ‘proud culture that is endowed with “ironically” limited vision’. In her view, the title and the cover are all part of a ‘gentle trap’ set by Calvino.⁹²⁰ In this respect, it should be noted that the Dürer woodcut that graces the cover of *Palomar* has been viewed as a prime example of the relationship of the ‘male artist to the female observed’, a relationship that underlines the ‘commanding attitude taken [by the male artist] toward the possession of the world’ as well as towards the central image of the female nude.⁹²¹ Jeannet ends her chapter on the female presence in Calvino (as well as her volume) with praise for Calvino’s ‘sincerity’ in reflecting on ‘our society’s hypocrisies and predicaments’, opening up to an uncertain future.⁹²² Francesca Di Blasio closes and frames her chapter ‘Framing the Gaze’ with Calvino, ‘un acuto osservatore della nostra epoca’, who delivers a meta-commentary in recognizable fashion, with his *Palomar* and its deconstruction of the ‘ovvietà di una osservazione sistematica’.⁹²³

Considering the above, Carol Lazzaro-Weis’ inclusion of Calvino in a course that ‘deals primarily with Italian women writers and their use of diverse genres to express their individual and communal protests and desires’ seems logical and straightforward: as long, of course, as Calvino is cast as someone who indefatigably

⁹¹⁸ Belpoliti, *L’occhio di Calvino*, cit., pp. 44-45.

⁹¹⁹ Sharon Wood, ‘The Reflections of Mr Palomar’, pp. 135, 140 (partially quoted on page 204); Cf. Antonello, *Il ménage*, cit., pp. 217-18; Marilyn Schneider, ‘Subject or Object’, cit., pp. 172, 182.

⁹²⁰ Jeannet, *Under the Radiant Sun*, cit., pp. 51-60; Cf. Bolongaro, ‘Calvino’s Encounter with the Animal’, cit., pp. 123-24; Schneider, ‘Subject or Object’, cit., pp. 173-74.

⁹²¹ Svetlana Alpers, ‘Art History and its Exclusions: the Example of Dutch Art’, in *Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany*, ed. by Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (New York; London: Harper & Row, 1982), pp. 182-99, p. 187. It is thus no coincidence that the very same woodcut is to be found on Susan Bordo’s volume *The Flight to Objectivity: Essays on Cartesianism and Culture*.

⁹²² Jeannet, *Under the Radiant Sun*, cit., p. 174.

⁹²³ Di Blasio, *Op. cit.*, pp. 42-43.

(as well as imperfectly) reflects on those very same ‘individual and communal protests and desires’ without losing sight of alternatives or alterity.⁹²⁴

⁹²⁴ Carol Lazzaro-Weis, ‘Reading Calvino’s Women’, in *Approaches to Teaching*, cit., pp. 74-82, p. 75.

Moving beyond Calvino with Calvino: will the real Calvino please stand up?

Like many critics, Angela Jeannet has used the introduction to her volume on Calvino to explain the specific task that awaits every Calvino critic; a daunting task, that is: ‘Calvino seems to have said everything, controlled everything, foreseen everything about his own writing, with a lucidity and agility that make the critic despair.’⁹²⁵ This thesis has evidenced that there is truth in the statement of Jeannet. However, instead of making the critic ‘despair’, it should – and Jeannet and other critics that have voiced similar doubts will certainly agree – drive scholars mostly to reflect, to reflect upon the question as to why Calvino has this effect, which cannot be simply reduced to the quantity of what Calvino has written, but inevitably also to specific qualities of his writing. This thesis strives to provide some answers to that critical node, which subtends many other ones.

An important premise of my investigation has been that images that are woven through and around the text, in a tapestry of the imagination (that is co-authored by the ‘real’ Calvino, critics and other readers), inevitably act upon our readings of the essence of ‘Italo Calvino’ and even of his single volumes when, seemingly, considered ‘on their own’. Calvino, as a peculiar kind of ‘celebrity’, has helped to carve out these images, both behind the curtains and on stage, in his many but not separate roles as writer, editor, critic, journalist and even as person being interviewed. His highly visible side as ‘Italo Calvino’ in the media has come to intertwine meaningfully with his shadow-persona as editor, who is visible too, but in a different, seemingly more indirect way, namely in the choices and the products that he makes, of book covers, judgements on books, letters to suggest stylistic changes to writers, et cetera. Therefore, I wholeheartedly agree with Eugenio Bolongaro when he writes that ‘Calvino himself must bear some of the responsibility for the partiality of the scholarship on his works (...) he sought at times to project an image that made perfect sense as a marketing strategy but cannot truly stand up to closer scrutiny.’⁹²⁶ However, one should not necessarily *fault* Calvino for abiding by the rules of the editorial game, for essentially playing the game exceptionally well.

⁹²⁵ Jeannet, *Under the Radiant Sun*, cit., p. xiv.

⁹²⁶ Bolongaro, *Italo Calvino and the Compass*, cit., p. 10.

Bologaro's statement contains a kernel, a silent core, that is not often voiced in criticism and that deserves to be spelled out loud and clear. Critics are necessarily implicated in the aforesaid game, even if they claim not to want to play, to have decided on separate rules, or to only want to watch. As critics, they form their own essential image of Calvino (or of any writer for that matter), which does not fully coincide with the editorial or mediatic image of Calvino, but which does inevitably share some elements, in a network of lines that interlace, with a resonance that works both ways. Also within academia, in many instances a largely instrumentalized 'Calvino' has circulated, who is shown through parts instead of as a whole, fragmented in order to illustrate a point and often used, arguably, mostly for the authority that he represents.

The first chapter of this thesis started to trace the way these different Calvini meet and interweave, still focusing more on the similarities than on fractures. The reduction of Calvino to an essence or a set of essences has been discussed, concentrating on what might be called a metonymization that proceeds amongst other things through images (such as book covers), characters (especially Palomar, but also other allegedly 'autobiographical' parts of Calvino's oeuvre), famous phrases, key words and themes, as well as poetological constants (the *Lezioni americane* are the main focal point in this case). The way that both critics and Calvino himself have responded to mediatic and editorial concerns, to everything that 'surrounds' the book to produce a promotional 'blur', is critically assessed and emphatically put into dialogue with each other (a critical choice that underlies the whole of this dissertation). This is not posited as a direct link of cause and effect, nor as a teleological order (which, for example, takes Calvino as old-fashioned 'author' and therefore as the privileged first reader, followed by a cohort of influential but first and foremost 'friendly' critics), but more as a field in the sense of voices that interrelate, that communicate and inevitably build upon each other, strengthen each other (even when they represent opposing, antagonistic opinions).

Thereafter, canons have come to the fore, in their historical, plural reality, both national and transnational, closed and overlapping, representing a never-ending tension between immanence and transcendence. In chapter two, Calvino's place is treated as a shifting place, determined by the specific, canonical perspective which one adopts, different perspectives that can provide similar images but that

nonetheless distort 'Italo Calvino' – that always presumed, non-existing essence – in their own meaningful way. Calvino's involvement in canonical negotiations is considered in a critical context of difference and distinction. The importance of specific 'elective affinities' is traced in concrete moments and environments that have provided an important stimulus for their circulation. The suggestion of a moving constellation thus ensues, in which Hemingway, Ariosto, Vittorini, Pavese, Borges and others (such as Pasolini on the 'negative', counter-canon side) have their role and their critical weight.

The plural reality of canons is explored by not simply positing one, sterile, universal pantheon of the classics, but by presenting the open antagonisms, especially in Italy, towards the Ligurian author, antagonisms that follow fairly established lines of counterculture and 'countercanon' and thus betray the possible reasons for Calvino's critical success in the first place. Inversely, the last section of the second chapter follows the thread of an all too ethereal Calvino, whose canonical status seemingly survives the possible laceration of paradox by being tied to authors of reasonably universal appeal such as Jorge Luis Borges. The problem in such a transnational canonical profile is evident in the way this status of 'unique author' lives alongside imprecisely posited affiliations (mostly from an Anglo-Saxon context) with literary movements such as postmodernism, which have resulted mostly in estranged reactions or dignified silence from Italy. Binaries such as 'Calvino-Pasolini' or 'Calvino-Borges' tend to erase differences or exacerbate them, showing more of critical prejudices or necessities than of the authors themselves. Nonetheless, the authors themselves take part in this polarized, binarized logic which seems an inescapable element both of authorial images and of the writing of literary history, from Francesco De Sanctis to Harold Bloom and Giovanni Raboni.

The third chapter singles out the case of a very marginal Calvino that has failed to really bustle and bloom within the broader framework of Calvino criticism: a science fiction Calvino. This science fiction Calvino has lived an intriguing, albeit nebulous existence. At first, to many readers (as well as to Calvino himself), the question as to whether his seminal series, *Cosmicomiche*, can in any sense be called science fiction seemed logical and even inescapable to some extent. However, in Italy the first suggestions fairly soon turned into little more than a faint whisper when authoritative figures such as Montale and Calvino himself firmly argued against such

a similarity – arguably partly because of canonical divisions between ‘high’ and ‘low’ literature. In the United States and the United Kingdom, where science fiction was more culturally ‘congenial’ and respectable, this Calvino – and its close relative, ‘Fantasy Calvino’ – resonated more strongly and significantly changed the image of the self-avowed ‘newyorkese’ writer. The resulting Calvini tend to be based more strongly on his ‘after-*Cosmicomiche*’ books, and are more easily adapted and adopted in different canons, but at the same time often considered to be too far removed from the Italian context.

The final part of the dissertation avoids an effect of summing up the other chapters: if anything, it should provide some sort of ‘square root’ of smaller fragments that suggest how parallel and seemingly exclusive Calvini can be deduced from the other chapters according to different reading cultures and –conventions. Calvino in translation changes face, but nonetheless non-Italian readers are able to point to who ‘Italo Calvino’ is. Language and meaning cannot be separated and translation brings to light all the more clearly that a word is not a mere reflection of an underlying meaning, since it comes with a context of use and connotation. Nonetheless, in order to communicate an authorial image that would otherwise be out of reach, obstacles in translation tend to be flattened out by choosing a translation that ‘will do’ in practical terms, but which potentially does slightly alter the said image. What happens when ‘sguardo’ becomes ‘gaze’, when a ‘scrittore fantastico’ becomes a ‘writer of Fantasy’, ‘leggerezza’ becomes ‘lightness’ (in Calvino’s mind) and then again ‘leggerezza’, or when – inversely – ‘memos’ are turned into ‘lezioni’ and ‘consistency’ becomes... ‘coerenza’? Or ‘costanza’? Is it useful, in such a case, to talk of ‘precedence’, of meaning that is more true or real with respect to its ‘derivative’? The answer I have suggested is, clearly: no. Instead I have put different Calvini alongside each other without trying to reconfirm established, ‘pure’, Italian Calvini. The idea in doing so is that (in an analogy) the view of an English, seventeenth-century spectator of Shakespeare is not more valid, more ‘true’ than, for instance, a Shakespeare through twenty-first-century, Jamaican eyes.

Several reading strategies that have (recently) provided ‘alternative Calvini’ – some (recently) successful, others more or less neglected in criticism – are proposed in the last chapter. Of the resulting Calvini, the ‘fantastic’ Calvino is the most well-known, albeit that here the fantastic Calvino is considered within the framework of

the material presence and dissemination of his works in the United States and the United Kingdom. The classic *impegnò* debate in Calvino criticism is revisited *not* by traditionally pitting it against the ‘fantastic’ Calvino, but by putting it alongside relatively new perspectives, such as of posthumanism, ecocriticism, animal studies, and feminist studies. What emerges is a surprisingly versatile Calvino, who has convincingly incorporated issues in his works about the borders of human being, as well as of the purported internal divisions between human beings. The effort here has been to bring together various strands and dispersed traces and make them cohere without erasing differences. For example, that Calvino is ‘interesting’ from a feminist point of view, does not necessarily mean that he is a convincing feminist. Again, not so much the letter of the text but the critical interpretation of the lateral, underlying, connotative meanings of Calvino’s works and positioning as a writer seems mostly to determine whether his contributions are assessed predominantly positively or negatively.

In this way, like Elizabeth Leake in her volume on Silone, I have tried to undermine the persistent critical fiction that ‘the common sense message (...) the broadly written message to which most of the textual structures point, is mostly visible when the novels are considered as independent beings read in isolation from outside factors’, that, moreover, ‘novels are closed systems whose elements can be read only in relationship to each other’.⁹²⁷ This idea is part of a critical *modus operandi*, and even when recognized and problematized, an alternative does not always seem readily available. I have thus tried to make part of the critical unconscious conscious, to bring some interstices of critical thought into the realm of the spoken. The fact that I in turn have my own interstices is undeniable and inevitable, and by trying to unearth them I have also tried to involve my own critical premises and methodology. Even if this happens, by definition, imperfectly, making these interstices part of the critical debate nevertheless serves a function, a function which can only really be *falsified* and finds meaning in f(r)iction.

The question is, however, if all these metacritical inquiries really help to liberate subterranean Calvini that have evolved underground into ‘Have-nots’ with a different, deformed and highly undernourished constitution? In a way, this question

⁹²⁷ Leake, *Op. cit.*, p. 154.

means if we, as critics, can properly do away with essences, in all their phantomatic, Platonic promise of transcendence. Like Calvino's Marco Polo, critics behold lines even in the most temporal of apparitions, and lines that link disparate elements for the briefest of moments can leave a lasting impression on the mind, especially when narrativized. The answer, in part, might lie in the difficult balance between 'faithful' and 'heretic' readings that every critic faces: respecting the text does not necessarily mean refraining from its suggestions. False etymology often proves powerful because it suggests both essences and essential connections, even if they are not real. I would propose an approach that is slightly less philological and somewhat more open to the way that real echoes and false etymologies, even though initially 'mistaken', can open up possibilities that are enclosed in the material, in the inherent, undecided ambivalence of meaning and communication; maybe this approach is most true to the consciously fallible, 'perfect' writings of Calvino.

*Un uomo si mette in marcia per raggiungere, passo a passo, Italo Calvino. Non è ancora arrivato.*⁹²⁸

⁹²⁸ Adapted from Calvino, *Palomar*, cit., back cover: 'Un uomo si mette in marcia per raggiungere, passo a passo, la saggezza. Non è ancora arrivato.'

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